

# MODERN fishing

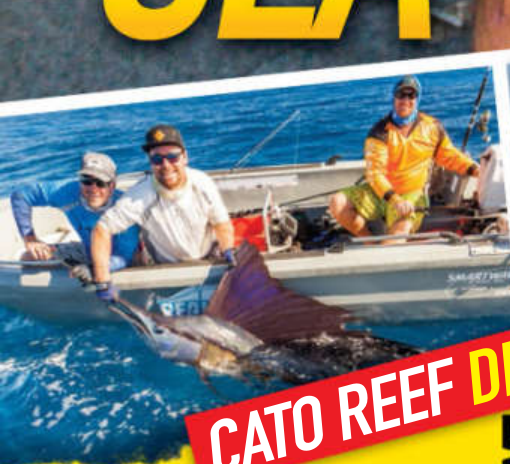
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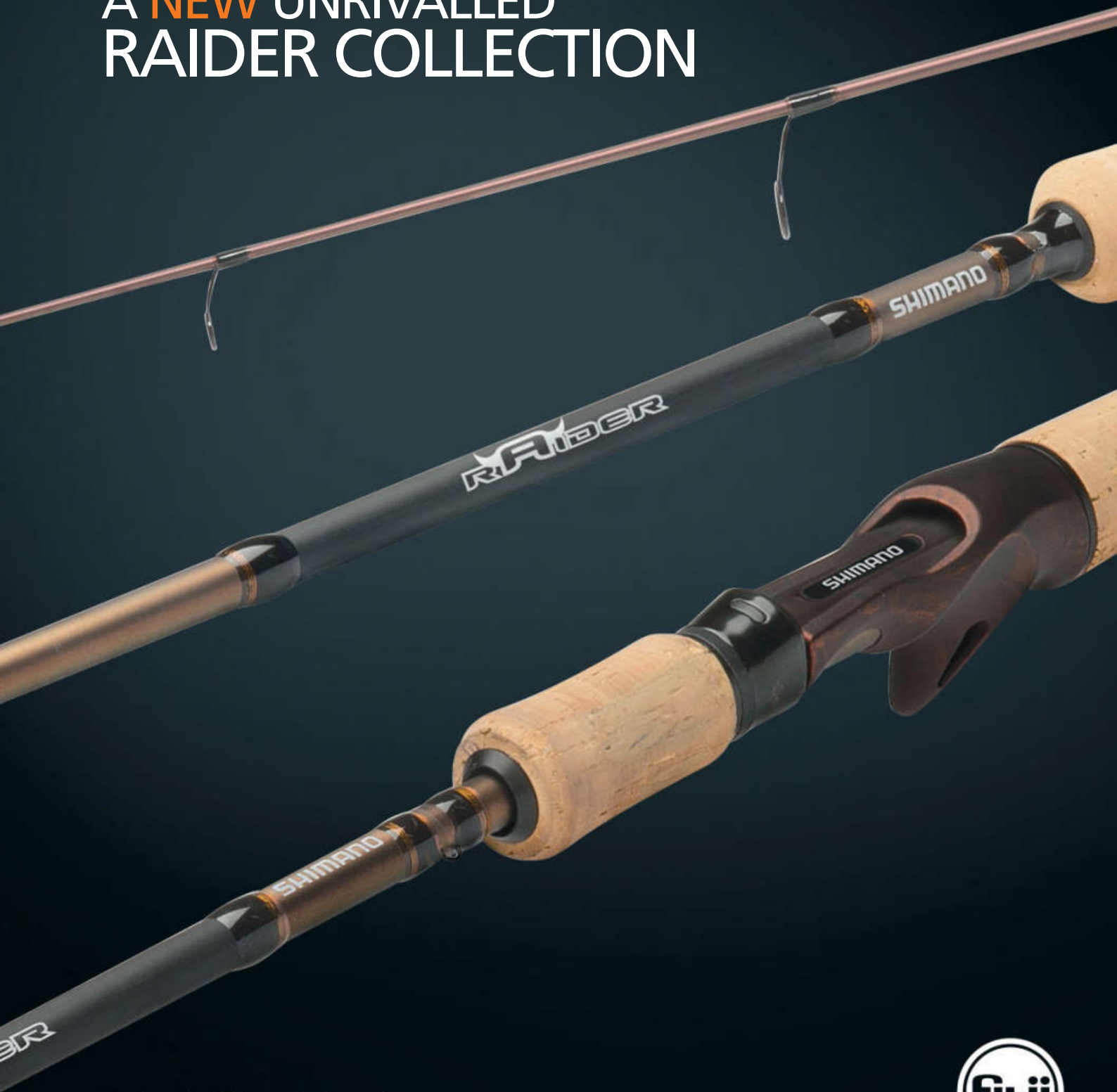
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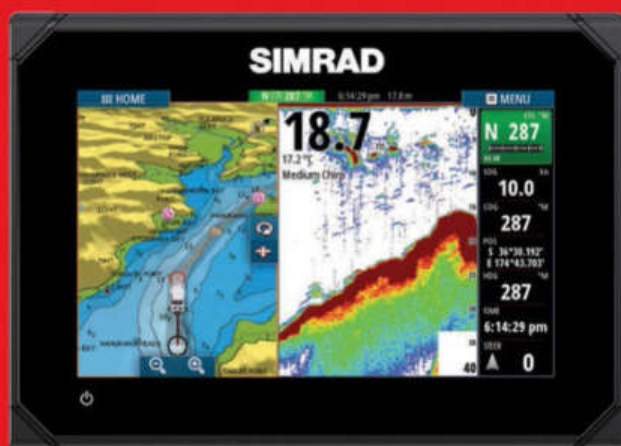
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## MODERN fishing

### THE CREW

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# KEEPIN' IT FRESH!

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# OUT OF THIS WORLD

**From all the crew at Modern Fishing, we hope this issue inspires you to dream big and fish bigger!**

**A** milestone for us, I will always remember this issue as the one where we got to share a truly special experience, an experience that took us to an unworldly place and an experience that brings this magical place one step closer to anyone willing to travel. I'm talking about our trip out to the southern Coral Sea to fish the incredible Cato and Wreck Reefs where we would experience fishing that I thought could only exist in another universe.

We are lucky enough here at MF to get to experience a good range of locations around Australia and the world and some of them have been nothing short of spectacular but this Coral Sea trip was something else entirely. The effort it took to get this trip off the ground was immense and the expectations were huge. The amount of money that various people had invested weighed heavily on me as the organiser and I wanted nothing more than to call it a success. I was never

had never met was a big step. Convincing them that we needed to take our own boat out with us was the next and to be honest, how many charter companies do you know that would or even could, crane a 6 metre centre console onto their deck?

Looking back on it now, maybe I sounded a little demanding at the time but Reality Charters were playing the yes game with every request I had and all the elements that we incorporated into this trip made it that little bit more special than your average charter.

When I arrived in Bundaberg, it was a couple of days earlier than the rest of the passengers as I was there to assist in getting the boat onto the mothership. After two days of driving from Sydney, I arrived and it was all hands on deck to get the job done before the light faded. Custom, engineered bracing poles were made for the TABS, the crane had been specially rated to handle the load and the crew had been prepped well for the lift. Despite all the planning, it was a big task and all were secretly

**"I will always remember this issue as the one where we got to share a truly special experience"**

going to be satisfied with good fishing, nor even excellent fishing. In my head I needed it to be out of this world and let's just say, I came away satisfied that all the effort had paid off, and then some!

You can read all about the fishing in the major feature article on page 18 or you can watch it all unfold on the DVD (which is another milestone for us) but right now, I just want to let you know of the logistics it took to pull this trip off.

First of all, finding a charter company that were willing to make the 200 nautical mile trip out to an unknown location with a bunch of blokes that they

praying that there would be no problems as it could have been disastrous. Luckily for all, the TABS made it up on to its custom built cradle albeit after quite a few attempts and everyone involved were now well equipped to handle the lift off while out on the reef which would be the real test. I mean, it's one thing to have success in the calm waters of the marina but to do it in swell and wind was going to be another tough ask.

The lift was the big ticket item but there were plenty of other logistical nightmares that presented themselves. Reality Charters have been running extended dive and fishing trips for a long time but this was the by far the biggest they had ever undertaken and planning and prepping for twenty people to be at sea for ten days is no walk in the park and to do it in such an unknown environment really cemented the fact that we were in the hands of true professionals.

While there were many people we wanted to please with this trip, it's you the readers that I hope to impress the most. I hope you enjoy the read and are excited and inspired by the DVD to get out there and do the trip for yourself as it's as Damon Olsen wrote in his original report on the area - "a life altering experience". Reality Fishing Charters were so impressed with the place that they are now offering the trip up to the public so if your idea of a good time is doing battle with some of the meanest, strongest and exotic fish Australia can offer up then you'll want to jump on this opportunity!

*Ads*



**Getting the TABS on and off at sea was the most daunting operation and thankfully was done without incident**



**Smiles all round after the trip of a lifetime!**



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# A FLATTIE'S TALE

**Teaching kids the fundamentals of fishing is made easy with the humble flathead**

**F**ishing literally every day, I get to chase some of the most exotic, toughest and not to mention biggest fish in the ocean. The old question of what is your favourite fish keeps coming up, especially what is my favourite fish to eat. Now obviously I get to eat some pretty awesome fish not just the run of the mill stuff, but unique species like the delicious deep water Rays bream which you would rarely see in a fish shop, to the highly prized mahi mahi which is as good as it gets on the BBQ. These species are sensational on the table, but can be hard to catch unless you have a decent boat so the average angler rarely gets to enjoy them for dinner. However despite access to all these exotics, my favourite table fish also happens to be one of the most accessible in Australia.

**"A large bunch of anglers could attest to their first fish on a lure being a flattie"**


The humble flathead is found right around the country and is arguably one of the most popular fish we have. I have fond memories as a kid down on Port Phillip Bay chasing flathead with a handline. Flathead are not renowned

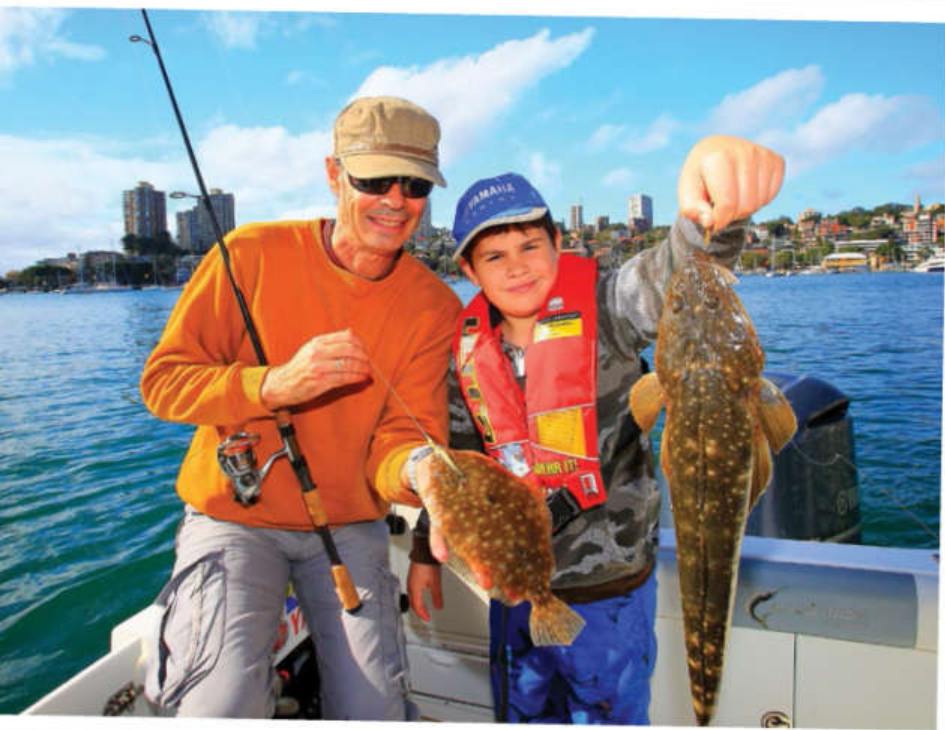
for their fighting ability even on a handline, instead it was always their table qualities that had me chasing them. Flathead tails in beer batter is as good as it gets! The problem is these days I get so wrapped up chasing big fish that I sometimes forget that the simple things in life are often the best and this came flooding back recently while fishing in Melbourne. Keen to relive my youth I took the kids flatty fishing and then cooked them up for dinner. It was an instant hit and unwillingly I created a monster because now my youngest Cooper only wants to catch flatties for dinner!

Back in Sydney recently, I had a rare day off and decided to see what the kids wanted to do and you guessed it, Coops wanted another flatty session. So along with mate Mal Holland we hit Sydney Harbour. Fishing one of the

secluded bays surrounded by moored boats, we flicked lures about probing the depths. Despite the dropping water temperature the flathead were on the case and we quickly started scoring a few. The great thing about flathead is that they are relatively easy to catch and that's what makes them so great for all fishers, but especially kids. You can literally catch them with any technique on any type of tackle, bait or lures they don't care, they will eat it if you can get it in front of them.

However for me the best fun is casting lures and they are the ideal species to help along the progress of younger kids. Almost anyone who fishes in the southern states has probably utilized the humble flathead as a stepping stone in their fishing and a large bunch of anglers could attest to their first fish on a lure being a flattie.

In Victoria sand flathead dominate catches while in NSW it's the dusky that reign supreme and better still the stocks are in great shape making them the perfect sustainable dinner. You don't need to catch big fish instead 36cm up to 50cm fish are ideal and that way you can let the big ones go and still take home a feed of one of the best eating fish in the ocean! 



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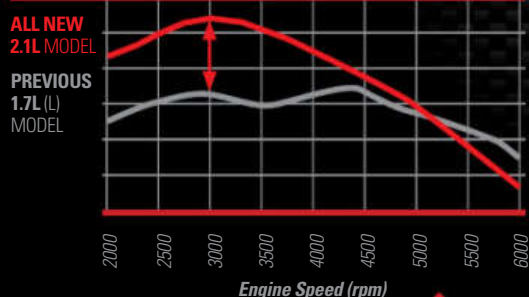
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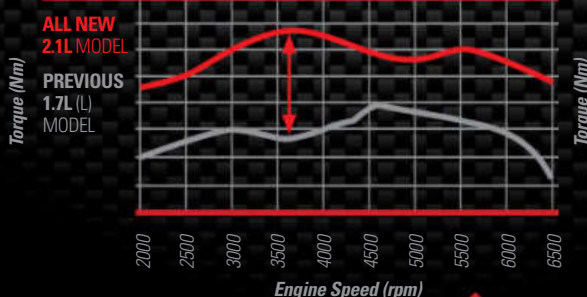
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# CATCH OF THE MONTH

***Congratulations to the winner of our Catch of the Month competition! Email your entries to the Modern Fishing team at [editorial@modernfishing.com.au](mailto:editorial@modernfishing.com.au) for your chance to win next month***

## HOW TO ENTER

If you'd like a chance to win a LOWRANCE Mark 4 Sounder, send us an email at [editorial@modernfishing.com.au](mailto:editorial@modernfishing.com.au)

The Lowrance Mark 4 Sounder unit features track-back technology, a Mini-SD card slot and is valued at \$299 RRP.

Make sure you include a high-resolution photo and a bit of information about yourself and your catch. The winner of Catch of the Month will be decided by the Modern Fishing team on not only the quality of the catch, but the story behind it too!

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# B'DAY TO REMEMBER

Hi ME,

I recently celebrated my 30th birthday at Twin Lakes in Tasmania and the place lived up to all expectations! We had an amazing time chasing brown and rainbow trout and Atlantic salmon on fly and I caught my PB in all three species. The highlight was definitely seeing the rest of the family catch their first ever fish on fly and especially seeing my wife Susan get stretched by a 10 pound salmon! Everyone has caught the fly fishing bug and we are already organising another trip in summer!

Regards Nev



**WINNER!**

G'day Nev,

Cheers for dropping a line mate! We loved the shots of these quality fish and were stoked to hear you and the family all managed some great fish. It's a pretty remarkable fishery down there. Where else in the world can you consistently catch salmon and trout of that caliber and on fly too.

You better keep a keen eye on the mailbox as we'll be sending you a belated birthday present in the form of a Lowrance Mark 4 sounder. We hope you love it mate and look forward to seeing some more of your fishing exploits in the future!

**MF Team**

## CATCH OF THE MONTH

# AUSSIE INGIUNITY

G'day guys,

Recently I went on a family holiday to Yamba in Northern NSW where I captured my PB 83cm flathead. We did not have high expectations of catching a fish, rather just soaking in the family fun that fishing provides. We didn't take a landing net and that proved to be a mistake as we found some good fish but the lack of net was making it very difficult to land fish off the rock wall. On our last day of fishing and the last day of our holiday, my Dad and I decided to make a landing net with what we had. Curling a coat hanger and zip tying a bait net to it that we had for worming and holding it on the end of a PVC pipe, we had ourselves a makeshift net and it allowed us to capture this flattie! The moral of the story – always take a net but if you still forget, improvise!

Love the mag.  
Jye

Hi Jye,

It sounds like you had a pretty good trip with the family but you should always take a net! You never know when that trophy fish might come along.

Luckily you were able to think up a pretty clever way of making your own and it obviously worked too. Congrats on the flattie mate and cheers for sending us in some shots.

MF Team



# SALMON SUCCESS

Hi modern fishing,

My name is Lachlan Swindale and I am 12 years old. I was recently on a fishing trip to lake Jindabyne with my Dad and we managed to find this amazing fish!

I caught the 72cm Atlantic salmon on a Rapala CD07 Countdown in the Brook Trout colour. It was caught on 10lb black magic line and it put up a great fight!

This was my first trip to Lake Jindabyne with my dad and it was my first Atlantic salmon – I think I'll be going on plenty more of these trips now.

Thanks  
Lachlan Swindale



Hi Lachlan,

That is a stunning fish buddy and a great way to kick off in a new location. Jindabyne is certainly a good place to find the big trout and salmon and a great place to hone your lure fishing skills. It looks like you've got it pretty well sussed out too.

Thanks for sharing your catch with us, we look forward to seeing plenty more in the future.

MF Team



# BREAD FED BREAM

Hi guys,

I've been doing a lot of fishing off our back jetty lately and there's been plenty of good bream around but I'm having a bit of trouble catching them. I took this photo with Dad's underwater camera when we were feeding them some bread. Do you know what lure I could use to catch them as they don't seem to like the one's I'm using?

Jason

G'day Jason,

That's a great shot and a good question too mate. Those jetty bream are fed pretty well and can be hard to tempt unless you have some good bait or bread. We suggest you try using very small hardbodies or soft plastics or if you're keen to try something new, you could get a cheap fly fishing outfit and throw a bread fly at them.

Just remember that however you fish for them, they are going to be pretty wary so use light line and fluorocarbon leaders to avoid them shying away.

MF Team







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# ***WRECKS, RANTS AND CATO CHAOS***

The Modern Fishing team and mates  
travel wide to fish the barely touched  
islets of the South Coral Sea

WORDS BY ADAM NICOLSON IMAGES BY DAVE WOLTSCHENKO







The big mothership docked in Bundaberg and ready for departure. Exciting times ahead!

Pre-departure tackle prep of the mountains of gear on board



**T**his trip was long in the making and to be honest, it never looked like it had legs until we bit the bullet and put the call out on Facebook. We wanted to see how much interest we could drum up as we were keen to take a bunch of fisho's out on the trip of a lifetime.

My good mate and colleague Shaun had originally brought up the idea of heading to Cato Reef, the southernmost islet in the Coral Sea some 200 nautical miles east of Bundaberg and needless to say I was intrigued by the idea of undertaking such a huge trip. So much so that as soon as I left his office I jumped on the net and started my research. I typed 'Cato Island' into the search engine and clicked on the trusty (not) Wikipedia link as this was the first one to come up.

'Cato Island – Capital of the Gay and Lesbian Kingdom of the Coral Sea Islands' – Righto, it looked like I'd been had and I marched straight back into Shaun's office to let him know how funny I thought he was (not!).

**Me** – "Are you having a lend mate or what?"

**Shaun** – "What are you talking about? I thought you were looking into the trip..."

**Me** – "Yeah I was until I figured out you were trying to send me to the YMCA"

Obviously Shaun has no faith in the wonder that is Wikipedia and had combed over the first few links when

doing his own research. He had no clue that Cato had actually been publically declared as a micro nation in protest to anti-gay marriage laws by a group of gay rights activists but he was pretty impressed with himself that he'd managed to pull the wool over my eyes without even knowing he'd done it.

Moving past the funny business though, the first real taste of what Cato might be like was via a report written by Damon Olsen of Nomad Sportfishing based on the first trip he had undertaken to the area back in 2003, before the word 'Nomad' was a household name. The report was aptly named 'The Cato Reef Expedition'. This was not a trip, but an expedition as the true definition of the word hits the nail on the head; *"Expedition: A journey undertaken by a group of people with a particular purpose, especially that of exploration, research, or war"*.

Damon reports of trying conditions on a 36 hour journey out to the reef. "25 knots NE, straight on the nose!" says Damon of the horrendous weather on the trip out but also sums the trip up as "a life altering experience" and makes note that there will be many more trips to the Coral Sea in the future leading me to believe that this was the trip which sparked the massive operation which we now all know as Nomad Sportfishing. Now, I don't know about you but for me, any location that has the power to spark an idea that essentially changed the way of Australian charter fishing forever is a destination worth exploring!



A perfect morning on the first day at Cato Island. Anticipations were high as the boats were craned off the deck





## EXPLORATION, RESEARCH & WAR!

Essentially, this was the purpose of our own expedition. We wanted to go somewhere truly remote, where we would have to do the hard yards ourselves and it was becoming quickly apparent that Cato was the right place based on the tiny amount of information we could dig up on the place.

The first big hurdle came about quick though. We had no mothership and we had one idea for this trip that would really make it hard to get one. We wanted to take the Modern Fishing TABS out with us and neither of us had a clue how we would find someone with a mothership that would allow us to do this.

Enter Reality Fishing Charters. They answered our call out on Facebook and were keen to get involved in whatever way they could. They have an 80 foot catamaran, easily capable of undertaking a trip like this and the timing was perfect as

they were just in the process of expanding into fishing the Barrier Reef so they had recently purchased a bunch of poly tenders and kitted them out. When we asked them if they would be keen to tow our boat out there they were more than happy to oblige but also offered up another suggestion. "Why don't we crane it on to the deck?" replied James the Captain.

Now, for those of you who read MF regularly, you would have seen the MF TABS grace the pages of many an issue and you'll know that it's no little tender. It's a 6 metre, plate alloy centre console and comes in at a combined weight of around 1300kgs. That's a whole lot of boat to simply crane up onto the deck yet James and the crew were determined to make it happen. They had custom bracings specifically engineered that would suit the lift as well as an engineered cradle that would hold the TABS snug on the back of the mothership.

For Reality Charters, they were here for one reason. To *research* a relatively unknown area in the hopes of turning

it into a world-class Sportfishing destination. Anchorages, safe passages and any other hazards were high on the captain and crew's mind and this was to remain their focus for the trip as well as learn from us and the other anglers as to what clients are going to be expecting from a trip like this.

For the MF crew, the purpose was to find a bunch of keen sport fisho's to come out with us and *explore* the area for future charters. It was our job to branch out, fish hard and come back with as much information as possible so that future clients can get out there and hit the ground running.

For the rest of the guys we brought along, well, they were here for *war*! They were here to do battle with some of Australia's biggest GT's and to test their skills on finding and stopping giant dogtooth tuna. They were armed to the teeth with some of the toughest artillery our industry has to offer and by the end of the expedition, these would be well and truly, tried and tested!

***"This location changed Australian charter fishing forever!"***





## GOING ALL-OUT

Looking endlessly over various topography maps including Google Earth and Navionics, I found myself constantly fixated on another reef system to the north named Wreck Reef – a chain of islets and sand cays. I knew about Wreck Reef and had seen a few videos in the past of monster dogtooth battles and huge wahoo.

**Jake Lawson and arguably the fish of the trip! At 143cm tip length, it was no pup!**



**Stickbaits, poppers..... you name it, they ate it!**

It was a 'mere' 65 nautical miles to the north and I figured since we're already doing a round trip of about 500 nautical miles, why not tack on a few extra and visit another area. I put it to Shaun and of course he needed no convincing and soon after we were proposing the idea to the charter crew who were again all too keen to take it on.

**Tim Milat and a bruiser caught on his first cast on day 2, only metres from the overnight anchorage**



It was still pitch black, about 4:00am when the constant rumble of the big diesel engines stopped abruptly. We had been listening to these things groan away for the past 26 hours and the sudden sound of nothing acted as a silent alarm clock, waking all on board (those of us who could sleep anyway). Thinking I was the first one up, it was a shock to walk down the hall and notice most of the bunk beds empty, everyone was on deck waiting in anticipation for that first bit of light to creep its way across the horizon and light up our new home for the next few days.

Before that light came though, Dean managed to sneak a couple of casts out off the bow of the mothership, scoring an almost instant strike from a big GT which promptly sparked everyone else to run off to gather up their own rods, all were rigged and ready thanks to a long steam out with too much time to kill.

The poor crew are running around, trying to anchor the big girl in a new and unknown location and we're sending poppers and stickbaits flying off in every which direction. I hate to think of the amount of times James and the crew had to bite their tongues on this trip!

The darkness eventually dropped out and revealed hands down, the most pristine place I had ever seen! The first thing that blew me away was the water clarity. The big cat's sounder reading 30 metres and I can see the coral bobbies below like I'm standing on them. Needless to say, everyone chowed down on breakfast pretty quickly and it was a race to see who could get in a tender and get out there first. Only problem was, we had to get them off the roof and the TABS needed to come off first. Looks like we'll see you out there suckers!

And so it was decided - we had a crew of 12 fishos, a photographer, a videographer and the 6 strong crew from Reality charters and we were to head out on a 10 day adventure like no other. We would have 3 full days fishing at Cato and after a steam through the night would arrive at the Wreck Reef group for another three full days. Needless to say, there were plenty of excited fishos on board and with a full day and two nights steam out to Cato, there would be ample time for all on board to get to know each other, rig the copious amounts of tackle and talk tactics for the trip ahead.

## CHAOS AT CATO

It's a surreal experience waking up in a location that you have dreamed about fishing for so long. The planning for this trip was intense and drawn out so to finally be there was a pretty magical feeling.





## GT'S FOR DAYS!

All the boats fanned out in search of their first fish and without doubt, the target for most was GT's. While a couple of the boats took off in the hopes of finding the dogtooth, they were quickly drawn back to the reefs edge when the call out over the radio claimed the first fish to be boated was a GT in the 40kg bracket and this was a mere 5 minutes into the trip! It was a big call but these were all experienced fisho's who had seen plenty of big GT's in their time and as the day progressed it became clear that it was no exaggeration.

Poppers and stickbaits were flying into the wash around the islands edge and the fish were coming in thick and fast as we were becoming more and more aware of the calibre of the fishing we had stumbled onto. Here you have a bunch of hardy GT fisho's and every one of them dragging their jaw on the floor, astounded at not only the massive numbers but the size too.

Mitch had caught that first fish and him and Nick continued to do battle with some true monsters. They had quickly worked out that by fishing deep into the washes and retrieving back into the drop off that the big fish were there in numbers and poor old Nick was getting his arse handed to him time and time again as he delivered his expensive hardware deep into the lair of the big GT's only to never see them again! Mitch's first fish on Cato was his PB GT and

only minutes later he went on to boat a coral trout from the same unforgiving territory that must have given 15kgs a real nudge, the thing was a dinosaur!

A few of the other boys and us left the edge of the island in search of a large patch of reef a couple of miles away that looked promising on the Navionics charts. At first glance it didn't look like much, just a large shelf of flat reef that came up out of slightly deeper water but after a few casts, it was clear that the hordes of GT's that plagued the island were in fine form out here too.

I wondered to myself when was the last time a lure had been cast here as the fish were in an absolute frenzy although my train of thought was quickly disrupted by another bone-jarring strike on the big Nomad Cubera popper. Meanwhile Shaun is doing battle down the back of the boat with not one but two fish! That's right, two fish on the one lure. A healthy little GT had beaten the rest to the punch but a chunky red bass was having none of it and promptly tried to steal the lure from the GT's mouth resulting in a three-way hook up with only two lures in the water!

As the sun set, all the tenders converged back at the mothership and the image of tired yet excited anglers told a thousand words. I will never forget that first night at Cato Reef – everyone on board had their own story of triumph and tragedy and the looks on the crews faces when they got a first glance at the size of the fish we had come across was absolutely priceless.

***“They were here to do battle with some of Australia’s biggest GT’s and to test their skills on finding and stopping giant dogtooth”***

Ads found the fish of his trip in this big Cato GT







**Crunching the ASWB, this GT was one caught from a wider patch of reef that was barely explored. So much potential!**



**Big fish, small boat! Josh's sailfish was a beast and to do it on the cast made it a pretty special catch!**

Over the following days the fishing only continued to improve. We sussed out more locations and found bigger fish!

Day two saw most boats hanging around the island again and without fail, big GT's were crashing topwater equally as well as the day before, if not better! I'm absolutely devastated we missed the fight on Jake's huge fish which was jaw-droppingly big in the photos I saw that night – I can only imagine how big this thing must have looked in the flesh! Jake was working a big ASWB stickbait on the calmer side of the island when the big GT made its move. They'd already seen some huge fish earlier that day but to have a fish of that size appear out of nowhere and engulf the stickbait had them all in disbelief. Describing the fish as looking more like a giant, black bus than a fish was a pretty fitting description I reckon! "The fight was brutal!" said Jake of his fish which went on to measure 143cm to the fork before swimming off to harass the hordes of baitfish sitting nervously in the blue holes.

Meanwhile, Dean, Gav and Glyn were stopping some huge fish of their own out on Hutchison Rock again. Everyone found huge fish but these boys certainly boated the most 40kg plus fish than any of the crew, at one stage landing a double of fish well into the fourties!

Before the trip licked off, everyone had a goal. Mine was to land not just a big GT, but a true giant over the 40kg mark and it was obvious Cato

was the place to do it. From what we had heard, Wreck Reef still had plenty of GT's but it sounded like Cato offered a much more realistic chance and come day 3, I was keener than ever to get it done! As we rounded the northern tip of the island, the swell was pushing hard into the reef and it looked perfect. If we did manage to find one, it was sure to be a brutal fight as we were fishing tight to the edge and the waves were the biggest they had been throughout the trip.

After what seemed like a hundred casts with the big 180 Nomad Cubera popper (which wasn't fairing too well after numerous battles), it happened! A huge fish came up and unlike many other takes, gently sipped the popper as it was dormant on the top and casually cruised back in towards the breaking waves. It was only the fact that I had seen the massive depth of the fish that told me to lock in and prepare for a huge struggle and as soon as I did, the fish realised something was wrong and put its foot down in a big way! Massive head shakes and a couple of blistering runs had me thinking it was over before it had begun but somehow with a locked drag on the big Stella and some fast thinking by Dave on the wheel, the fish reluctantly came clear of the reef as we dragged it into some deeper water. It was the fish that would make my trip and as we struggled to lift it over the gunnels of the TABS, I realised I didn't need another fish to make the whole expedition worthwhile!



**Josh fighting an enormous sailfish on a cast BFP swimbait**





## PELAGICS IN PLAGUES

In the coming days, poppers continued to fly into the washes for more enormous GT's, but we were also beginning to find other areas around Cato that were producing some amazing pelagic action. Yellowfin tuna were free jumping everywhere with mouths full of sauries while massive wahoo were demolishing jigs, poppers and trolled lures.

The yellowfin were high on everyone's list for this trip so we ventured wide of the reef in the TABS on day two after seeing a little bit of commotion off in the distance. Upon closer inspection we could see that they were indeed yellowfin and some big fish to boot. Large sickle fins could be seen as they jumped clear of the water and we were in hot pursuit but the schools were moving at an incredible pace, too fast for us to effectively cast our stickbaits to so we started slow trolling them in the general area the fish were in, hoping to luck across a school that was heading our way. Sure enough, minutes after feeding back the lures, we had a couple of solid strikes

resulting in a double hook up of nice sized 'fin which were tearing the water to foam out the back of the boat. After calling in the other boats, everyone was soon fishing wide in glassed out conditions, enjoying incredible popping and trolling for solid yellowfin. We also came across a patch of water holding a huge amount of wahoo double and triple hook ups became the norm rather than the exception and they weren't small fish either, averaging well over 20kgs!



Tender 3 on a big GT

Sight casting to endless cruising bluefin trevally on the flats was too much fun!





## TRAVEL CORAL SEA ADVENTURE

While we enjoyed a hot bite on wahoo and tuna, Scott and Josh (a couple of WA lads) were stuck in a battle of their own. We got a call out over the radio that they were midway through the fight on a big sailfish which nailed a BFP swimbait in shallow water and we just had to get in there to check it out. It came as no surprise to us though as earlier in the day we had found one free jumping straight off the back of the island and managed to get a hook up on the stickbait but the hooks just wouldn't stay in after some wild head thrashing.

Just as we arrived, a huge saily took to the air and it became apparent that they weren't kidding when they called it for a big fish! Sailfish aren't renowned for their stamina, rather putting in some hot-to-trot aerobic work and usually giving up the ghost fairly quickly but this one obviously hadn't read the rule books and continued to jump, dive deep and slog it out for a solid 30 minutes on PE8 tackle. It was a beast of a fish and when it finally came to the boat, Josh could barely manage a hoot for what was without doubt his fish of the trip!

All this action but where were the doggies? A ghost as they seemed, everyone wanted to

find them but we had no idea if they were around Cato in numbers and very little idea on where to start. We'd mapped out some likely areas before the trip kicked off and had combed over them pretty well for no result so far. It wasn't until the third and final day that we spotted a large mark come onto the Simrad screen, sitting in around 70 metres of water and about 20 metres off the bottom. It was unlike the other marks we had found in the area, it was much bigger, more pronounced than the other reef fish we had been jigging up. Motoring further onto the mark, more began to appear until the sounder lit up with a huge patch of fish in the same area. Shauno promptly dropped a jig down and within two lifts, the PE10 rod loaded up and promptly pinned him up against the rails of the boat. With no intention of stopping, it was over as quick as it had begun and Shaun was left wondering what had just happened to him.

We all knew what we had found and within seconds, more jigs were flung over the side and many more dustings were received. We simply couldn't stop these fish as they were sitting too close to the bottom giving them the



**Popping under the wreck of an old Japanese longliner on Cato Island**

advantage from the start. It was so frustrating as we just wanted to confirm that they were doggies and although we were 90 percent sure, we were reluctant to call in the rest of the boats on a hunch. Finally though, Shaun got some ground on what looked like a good fish and we could see that he had it beaten as it neared the surface. To a round of cheers that would have almost echoed back to the mothership some 5kms away, the first doggie of the trip hit the deck. It was no beast, in fact it was quite small but it didn't matter, it was the fish that everyone had been looking for on this trip and hopes were high that if enough of us were to fish the same area, someone would eventually get lucky and land a big one.



**The lagoon at Cato provides some of the most insane clear water sight casting!**





Dean Silvester and a popper crunching 'fin



You can't win them all! The sharks were everywhere at Cato but were mostly well behaved..... Mostly!



So we called the crew over for the last hurrah before packing up and heading to Wreck Reef for a new adventure. Jigs were dropping, poppers were flying as every boat joined in the fun/torture! Everyone hooked good fish but unfortunately every fish was lost and that one small fish of Shaun's remained the only doggie to be caught at Cato on our trip. (On a plus note for anyone wanting to head to Cato for dogtooth, the crew from Wilson tackle hit Cato a while after our trip and, as they put it themselves, "found the dog pound").

Motoring off to the north with Cato Island shrinking in the distance, everyone had time to reflect on what we'd experienced. Almost everyone had caught new species, smashed PB's out of the water and had seen things that you can only see

in a place this remote. To give you an idea on how good it was in a short wrap up, we caught well over 100 GT's in the three days fishing, every one saw GT's well over the 40kg mark, Mitch scored a coral trout that would have given 15kgs a nudge, Josh's sailfish on a stickbait was an unbelievably good capture but without doubt, all agreed that Jake Lawson's GT was the fish of the trip. A massive fish that measured 143cm to the fork and to be honest, I can't remember the girth but I know based on the length to girth charts, it put the fish in the 55-62kg mark! Whatever it weighed, it was enormous! Cato Reef is a truly remarkable place to experience with the bonus of some trophy fish that were eagerly awaiting our visit and I can tell you, I eagerly await a return visit! In fact, it's already booked in!



### PORPOISE PLAYGROUND

Steaming through the night, the Big Cat arrived at Porpoise Cay in the early hours of the morning and in stark contrast to the days previous. We had been lucky enough to have scored some balmy conditions at Cato but the wind had kicked up in a big way through the night and we were now staring down the barrel of a 30 knot sou' easterly which gave us no choice but to hide on the protected side of the islet. Things looked good still although there was not a lot of water moving around which most likely meant the bigger fish would be absent. GT's love the current and while we put the effort in to try and find them, they seemed non-existent - no doubt they would have been hunting hard along the edge most affected by the large winds but even in the bigger TABS, this wasn't an option.

Porpoise Cay is home to some monster coral trout!



Nick and Mitch had a blinder session on the trout with over 50 fish landed in quick succession!



The bonus to fishing this protected side was twofold. We got a much needed rest from the heavy handed tactics of GT's and we also found huge numbers of big blue spot trout. Stickbaits and poppers on the edge of the reef were being annihilated and the guys jigging the deeper water had a blinder session with over 50 quality fish in an hour long session. The average size of the blue spots would have been over 5kg and some true monsters well over ten kilos were caught too.

While the fishing was great fun, we had our rest and were keen to get back into the beasts that we had come here for and with the weather not looking like improving for the rest of the trip, we studied the maps of the Wreck Reef system and all decided that the plan to move to West Islet in the group would provide us with the most options in the current conditions.

The rumble of the big diesels started in the early hours of the next morning with the aim of arriving at West Islet just after day break. Excited to be at a new system and feeling somewhat rejuvenated after a day of 'small fish', everyone was keen to hit the water and this time it was the doggies that were on everyone's mind.





# A LITTLE HISTORY

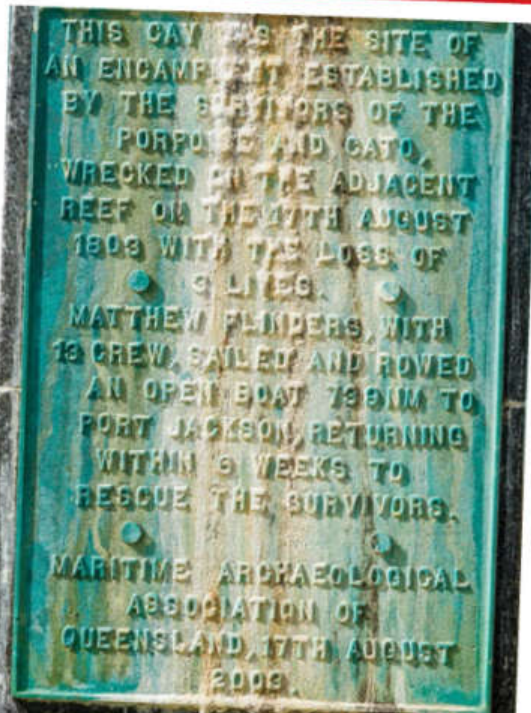
Wreck Reef, and in particular Porpoise Cay is home to one of Australia's most famous ship wrecks. On the 10th of August in 1803, Matthew Flinders sailed (as a passenger) on board the H.M.S Porpoise out of Port Jackson along with accompanying vessels, Cato and Bridgewater. Their path was a seemingly hazardless track through the outer Barrier Reef and then on to India.

In the middle of the night on the 17th of August, 7 days after departing Sydney, H.M.S Porpoise struck ground on an uncharted reef system which we now know as Porpoise Cay. All on board were fortunately able to make it off the vessel relatively unharmed but the fate was not the same for Cato. After witnessing Porpoise hit the reef, Captain Park of Cato ordered the crew to tack to the east while at the same time the Bridgewater tacked to the west putting them on a collision course. Captain Park instructed the crew to come off the wind, unfortunately putting Cato onto the reef not far from where Porpoise had run a ground. Laying precariously on its side with the decks facing into the relentless swell, Cato broke up quickly and by daybreak there was very little left of the vessel.

Despite the two ships being wrecked in the dark, miraculously only three men lost their lives but now the remaining crew were left to fend for themselves on the tiny sand cay after the Bridgewater failed to lend assistance.

Matthew Flinders, Captain Park and a small crew sailed and rowed one of the ships safety vessels, The Hope, for Sydney to raise the alarm while the crew of the two ships gathered what they could from the wreckages to build a small boat known as The Resource. The survivors were later picked up by a ship named Rolla and its accompanying schooners Cumberland and France.

It's a remarkable tale of survival and one that added to the adventure of our own trip. I'd hate to think of the horror the crew of the two vessels faced that night and over the following six weeks. I certainly feel lucky for the technology that allows us to do trips like this in relative safety.



The memorial plaque on Porpoise Cay reminds you how brutal a place this remote can be



There are some magic sight casting opportunities from all of the sand cays and islands



### WEST IS BEST

The call out over the radio came early as we were pushing along the reefs outer edge, content with finding a few good sized GT's and happy to be getting a good stretch again.

"We're on the doggies!" came a call from an unknown source. The radio reception was scratchy at best and when we finally figured out who was calling, we were able to find out where they were and scrambled over for a better look.

We arrived to find Tim with a grin from ear to ear, holding aloft a stunning looking doggie of around 15kgs and unbelievably he had somehow managed to drag the fish from the harsh reef with just a 6000 Stella and PE3 braid! It just goes to show how sometimes things go your way and with quality tackle, big fish can be stopped on relatively light gear if you do the all the right things.


Needless to say, the whole crew were soon on the spot and jigging away, getting blown away and thankfully landing a few more doggies to add to the list. It was tough fishing again with most hook ups resulting in a monumental bust off but that's fishing for doggies I guess. You win some, you lose many more! Doggies aside, the area was still producing other good fish too with GT's, black trevally, wahoo and yellowfin tuna all being jigged up on the one spot. It was vastly different to Cato with most of the doggies sitting up on the shallow edge of the drop off in around 30-40 metres of water and as the drop off continued, a more varied range of species would jump in for the show. It was a great way to fish the area as we were drifting directly out from the edge so in the one drift, you got a shot at multiple species.

***"Yellowfin tuna were free jumping everywhere with mouths full of sauries while massive wahoo were demolishing jigs, poppers and trolled lures"***

Tim with the fish that sparked an obsession. The boys scored some good doggies at West Islet but the big ones were playing hard ball!






A man wearing a black cap with 'ELITE' on it, sunglasses, and a dark long-sleeved shirt is holding a large yellowfin tuna. The fish is silver with a yellow stripe along its side and a yellow tail. The background shows a blue ocean and a clear sky.

**Richard Price  
from Elite Tackle  
finished the job on  
this yellowfin after  
a spectacular take  
on the popper**

I still clearly remember Shauno's big 'fin on the jig. That was a pretty spectacular fish! After dropping off into the deeper section, we hadn't seen a fish for a while when all of a sudden Shaun's jig stopped suddenly about half way up. Buckled over under heavy drag, the fish was screaming off deep and changing directions constantly before then making a dart for the surface. It was an insane fight on relatively light jigging tackle and we assumed it was a big wahoo due to the speed - that was until the tell-tale circle work ensued. The call was yellowfin and we weren't to be disappointed as a solid fish came reluctantly to the boat. What a fish! It's one thing to catch them on the troll, and another again on the cast but this thing was a wild fight on the jig!

The boys who had found the spot first were well aware of this and were keen to land that big doggie. While the rest of us were completing the drift, they were cutting it short and hanging where the doggies were and trying various techniques to improve their chances. Jake latched onto an absolute horse that monstered a big Bluefin trevally as it was being brought to the boat but unfortunately the hooks didn't find their mark as the big doggie just motored away with the "bait" in its mouth, eventually letting go. In the end, it didn't seem to matter what any of us did, those big fish just had it all over us throughout the whole trip. The biggest landed was probably around 25kg but on the plus side, we all gained a bit more of an idea on how to stop them for the next trip. At least we'll try anyway!

A large yellowfin tuna is being held by a person on a boat. The fish is very long and has a prominent yellow stripe along its side. The boat's name 'SBoats' is visible on the side. The background shows a blue ocean and a clear sky.

**A big 'fin caught on the  
jig around the southern  
side of West Islet**




## A FITTING END

This trip was all about breaking things. Breaking boundaries, gear, bodies and most of all our own PB's. It was so good to see everyone involved raving about finally cracking the fish they had really wanted to catch on this trip. For myself, it was just a big GT and I did so on the third day of the trip so that box was ticked for me. For others, it was a doggie and many did so as well.

For Shaun, the wait was long. He had never caught a wahoo before and it was the one fish he wanted to tick off the list. Through various forms of bad luck, Shaun had managed to avoid catching one of these speedsters for the whole trip, despite them being in plague proportions at times. It was starting to look like he was going home empty handed so we decided to really put in the time to help him get it done. We laid the jigs to rest and hung up our poppers in exchange for a couple of Rapala X-Rap 30's and began trolling the likely drop offs. One of the rods went off but without the tell-tale lightning fast run of a wahoo, Shaun handed the rod to Dave (the camera man) thinking it was another yellowfin. Well, wasn't that the icing on the cake as Dave promptly pumped a solid 20kg wahoo to the boat while Shaun begrudgingly congratulated him on his catch.

With an hour or so to go though, the two trolling rods both sung out in simultaneous harmony and all on board were hoping for a double on Shaun's new found nemesis. The fish were big, with more weight than we had seen previously on the trip so thoughts turned to other species, but all the while hoping for a 'toothy' critter to rear its head. Shaun sung out "No!" and as I was busy on the other side of the boat, my heart sunk for him as it sounded like he'd dropped the fish. I asked what happened and out came the shout "it's a wahoo!" right as my own fish surfaced as well. But not any old wahoo, they were both the biggest fish we had seen for the trip and to see that fish of Shaun's dreams hit the deck in the closing stages of the trip was a pretty fitting end!

Few words were spoken as we were heading back to the Big Cat for the last time, as one of the most magical sunsets unfolded in front of us. To be a part of such an insane trip filled with exploration and battles with giant fish was a truly great experience. To put your mind to something that is a little further out there than the norm and then pull it off in such spectacular fashion is something the experience itself can only describe! I hope you enjoy the article, enjoy the DVD and most importantly, enjoy your first trip to Cato as I have no doubt you'll want a slice of the action now! 

How big is that 'hoo!



## PEOPLE THAT MADE IT HAPPEN

### MAKO EYEWEAR

- For manufacturing top quality polarised sunglasses that allow us to see where we are going and more importantly, see the fish before they see us!

### ELITE TACKLE

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# STICK IT TO THE MAN

This is a lure that has gained little attention yet is highly deserved of it. Paul Malov explains the versatility of the sinking stick minnow

WORDS BY PAUL MALOV IMAGES BY  
ALEX FRANCHUK, DANIEL MACKRELL, PAUL MALOV







**S**inking stick minnows come in all shapes and sizes, with everything from bite sized minnows aimed at bream and perch, to large minnows aimed at kingfish and tuna and then everything in between. The fact that they are relatively easy to use and impart an enticing action, also makes them a great lure for everyone from beginners to seasoned anglers.

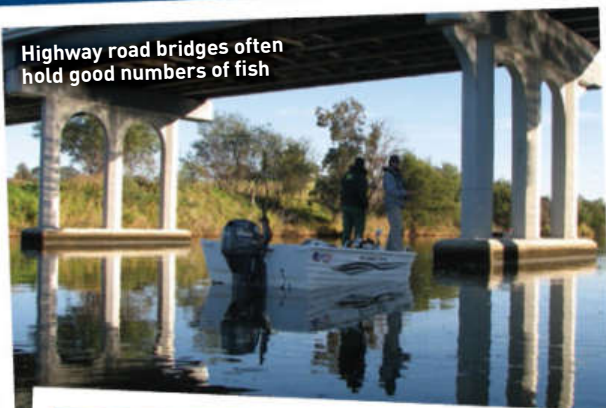
With a good variety of them on the market and with various sink rates, these lures are one of the most versatile of all, allowing the angler to fish all depths with just the one lure.



# WHERE TO USE THEM?

With a range of actions, size variations and sink rates, stick minnows can be fished in a number of different locations.

Highway road bridges often hold good numbers of fish



Alex Beh throwing a stick minnow in tight to some floating oyster racks



The author fishing some floating oyster racks at Forster, NSW



## JETTIES, PONTOONS & BRIDGES

Man-made structures like these would have to be my favourite areas I like to use stick minnows. Predominantly chasing bream, but often catching a variety of other species as by catch in these locations, such as estuary perch, flathead, silver trevally, snapper and mullet.

Jetties, pontoons and bridges are setup perfectly to be fished with a sinking minnow. With vertical walls, standing wooden pylons and concrete ledges for fish to sit on, under or behind. I like to pick apart every element of structure that I can.

I start out with a 'searching cast', 2-3 metres wide of my target in the hope that there is a fish hanging wide on the drop off, or perhaps there is an element of underwater structure that can't be seen from above. From there, I make a cast to the closest part of the structure and work my lure back to the boat or back to the bank if I am fishing land based. My thinking around this is to try and pick up a fish quickly, before I spook it by getting too close. From there, I work my way up and along the structure, until I've fished it entirely on both sides.

Use the current to your advantage where possible by making long casts a couple of metres past the end of the structure, let the stick minnow sink down to the bottom quarter of the water column and start to work it back to you, using the current to carry the lure for you. I will often slow down my retrieve and impart smaller twitches of the rod tip to keep my lure in the strike zone for a longer period of time when I get close to an eddy, or a visible pylon, in the hope that a fish is nearby and using the structure as an ambush spot.

## PRO TIP

Pick a suitable leader for the structure that you are fishing. Lighter doesn't always mean more bites, especially when you need to extract fish from nasty territory

*"These lures are one of the most versatile of all, allowing the angler to fish all depths with just the one lure"*





Prime fish holding structure

## NATURAL STRUCTURE

My preferred method of picking apart natural structure like logs and snags is with a weedless jighead and plastic combination, however a number of times I have found that in high pressured systems or during a tournament, the ability to present a lure that isn't often seen, will receive more bites and catch more fish. If you're worried about snagging up then you can retrofit some semi weedless W hooks which only have two tips and point backwards.

## BOAT HULLS

Often overlooked by many, at certain times of the year, fish will really congregate in good numbers under moored boats. The technique that I use on moored boats is similar to that around bridges and jetties. Depending on the conditions, I try and sit back as far as I can from a boat hull, as I've found these fish to be quite spooky and I try to use long accurate casts to my advantage. I try to cast past the end of the boat and then wind the lure back on an angle so that when I pause it, it flutters directly under the boat hull.

Depending on the time of year, fish may be holding tight to the hull, or just off the bottom, so the retrieve will vary from a relatively quick and aggressive twitch and pause retrieve in summer, to a slow and methodical, small hop and pause retrieve in the colder months.

## SHAPE AND SIZE IS IMPORTANT

Sinking stick minnows come in a variety of shapes and sizes. I carry a good selection of stick minnows in my arsenal and depending on the species that I am chasing and the environment, I will pick the most appropriate size/weight/colour for the conditions. Some days a small natural coloured stick bait will dominate, but on other days, a large brightly coloured lure will call the fish in, from a long way out. Mix them up until you find the right combination.

## PRO TIP

Look for the oldest, crustiest looking boat hull that you can. Growth on the bottom of the hull means more food for the larger predators. These are the boats that I will aim to target first



The older the boat, the better the fishing



# PROVEN LURES

## BREAM/PERCH/BASS – 30–50MM

SMITH SHIRASU  
SMITH CRYSTAL ALIVE  
TIEMCO STICK MINNOW  
ATOMIC SEMI HARDZ MINNOW  
MAGBITE MIMIQ SOLID SINKING PENCIL

The structure and vegetation in each system will determine the types of baitfish or smaller prey that the predatory fish are feeding on. A quality fish finder and a pair of good polarised sunglasses go a long way to helping you spot and clearly identify the vegetation and baitfish in the area where you are fishing which will then allow you to pick a suitably sized lure.

## FLATHEAD/SALMON/MANGROVE JACK/TREVALLY – 50–100MM

ATOMIC SEMI HARDZ MINNOW  
MARIA FLA-PEN  
LUCKY CRAFT WANDER

## LARGE PELAGIC STICK MINNOWS – 100MM +

MARIA DUPLEX  
BASSDAY BUNGY CAST  
SALTIGA DORADO SLIDER


*“The wonderful thing about sinking stick minnows is the ability to work these lures through all depths in the water column, at varied speeds and with enticing actions”*

### PRO TIP


Match your lure shape, size, colour and action as much as possible to the bait that is in the area where you are fishing for the best chance of hooking that fish of a lifetime

Anthony Adams  
with a quality black  
bream taken from  
a deep rockwall in  
East Gippsland





The Smith Crystal Alive is a great lure which gets further back under structure than most other stick minnows



Speedsters like Queenies love a quick moving stick minnow

## PRO TIP

Mix up your retrieve until you figure out what is working most effectively on a particular day, especially if you are fishing with other people – let one work the lure slowly and the other person more aggressively

I'll spend a little bit of time at the end of the retrieve, using the stick minnow as an 'ice jig' directly beneath me. I have often found that a fish will follow and track a lure, but will only bite it right at the end of the retrieve, directly beneath me – I believe this is due to a change in the action - it seems to drive them wild!

## HOW TO USE THEM

This is the trickiest area to get right, but once you catch your first fish on a stick minnow and get your technique dialled in, it will be hard to not pick up the rod with one tied on.

Depending on the time of year and how aggressive the fish are, these are the techniques that I will try, until I find the best retrieve for the day.

**Slow and steady lift and hop retrieve (works especially well in the winter months and around boat hulls and bridges)** – I make a long cast past the end of the structure that I am targeting and let the lure sink to the bottom. I will wind up the slack line and feel for any bites, before giving the rod tip a couple of short sharp twitches in an upwards direction, to get that lure up off the bottom 20-50cm and then let it flutter back down. Just as I finish my last twitch, I quickly wind up all the slack line and on a semi-tight line, I will feel for any bites as the lure sinks down. I will continue this technique all the way back to me and if I am fishing out of the boat or kayak,

**Power fishing (cover water quickly and effectively)** – I use this technique around boat hulls and jetties (floating and fixed) when chasing bream and it is especially effective with the Smith Crystal Alive sinking minnow in the shape of a prawn. The reason for this is because as the lure hits the water, it sinks backwards under the structure and not straight down like most other stick baits. The advantage of this is to be able to cover water that has been missed by other anglers and reach fish which are sitting further back under the structure – these are often bigger fish and are more willing to eat a lure!

A quick and aggressive retrieve generally works really well for pelagic species like salmon, tailor, trevally, queenfish, tuna, kingfish etc. Depending on the lure that I am using, I will either;

Wind at a steady speed, making some minor variations to the speed, or throwing in a pause or two to trigger a bite or;

Wind quickly and make the lure skip and dance on the surface, with the occasional dive under the surface or;

Wind at a varied speed and use the rod tip to make short sharp twitches in a downward direction, to impart more action on the lure.



The author with a solid East Gippsland bream caught in the deep

*“Unique lures rarely seen by fish, will often out-fish the usual ‘go to lures’ that we all have”*

### BY-CATCH


I have lost count of the number of times that I have been chasing bream around the jetties and bridges of Melbourne and Gippsland lakes and caught a variety of other species, including mulloway, flathead, salmon, snapper, tailor, estuary perch, trevally, whiting and even luderick!

The wonderful thing about sinking stick minnows is the ability to work these lures through all depths in the water column, at varied speeds and with enticing actions, which makes them absolutely deadly on most species.

Silver trevally in the Gippsland Lakes love stick minnows. Work them relatively fast for these guys



An unusual catch in the form of a luderick. If they catch these, they'll probably catch anything

Next time you think about tying on your favourite soft plastic or floating hard body, try a sinking stick minnow, I guarantee that you'll have a ball and as I mentioned earlier, unique lures rarely seen by fish, will often out-fish the usual 'go to lures' that we all have, especially on pressured waterways or in a tournament situation. 



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- Tempered glass screen
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- Includes blast gun, light and gloves



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# **BUILD 'EM UP!**

You don't have to travel far in the Territory to sample some of the finest build-up action. Chris Errity highlights his top 5 spots just a stone's throw from Darwin

WORDS AND IMAGES BY CHRIS ERRITY



## LOCATION: NT BUILD UP HOTSPOTS

**T**he build-up in Darwin from October to December each year is one of the best times to target barramundi as the water temperatures increase and they start to feed more voraciously again. The build-up signals mature male and female barra to gather around the mouths and rockbars of major estuaries. There are many areas you can target barra at this time of year around Darwin and in this article I will highlight five in particular and how and when to fish them with greater success.

An angler fights another 90 plus barra at the rock in Shoal Bay



One of my favourite lures to troll (8+ killalure Barrabait) at The Rock on the incoming tide



ET with a 110 taken casting a big green Bomber at the mouth of Kings Creek in Shoal Bay

## SHOAL BAY

Shoal Bay is a magnificent estuary situated just north of the Northern suburbs around Darwin. It is most easily accessed from the Buffalo creek ramp, only 15 minutes' drive from the city. The main tributary that flows into Shoal Bay is the Howard River and is one of the main reasons why this area is so rich in marine fauna. Shoal Bay can be fished over all tides, but is most probably more popular during the neap tide phase with smaller tidal variation. During neap tides the water clarity improves significantly and barra can be targeted using lures with plenty of success.

Buffalo Creek itself is one of the most popular land-based spots near Darwin where large metre-plus barra are caught each year during the build-up. A rock bar just upstream of the ramp is the best place to start fishing the last of the outgoing tide and staying as the tide first starts to push in. Shallow diving lures such as Reidys B52's and bombers work well here and a slow erratic retrieve will usually achieve the best results. The mouth of Buffalo Creek is also a great place to fish especially during the neaps when the water clarity is much better. In fact the mouths of any of the creeks or rivers that enter Shoal Bay can produce great fishing at this time of year.

Hope Inlet, Howard River, Little Howard River, Meckitt's creek and King Creek are the other tributaries that enter the bay. During the neap tides where there is 3m of movement or less, target these areas by trolling lures around the mouth mainly any time during the tide. Quite often the turn of the high tide will work better for larger fish as they patrol the mouths of these systems looking for a feed. It is important to have a good sounder with side and down imaging

so you can pinpoint where the fish are holding and then select lures that will best reach them. If the water is deeper up to 5m over the high tide then use lures such as the Reidys judge and Classic barra lures that can reach these depths on the troll.

If the water depth is 2m or less then use shallower diving lures to work the area on the troll. If trolling does not work then try casting to the areas where the fish are holding on the sounder. Sometimes just a change of direction can fire them up. If the hard bodies are not working then vibes and other soft plastics worked slowly across the bottom can often induce the fish to strike.

Another area famous for its barra fishing in Shoal Bay is 'The Rock'. Once again this fishes better on the neap tides when the water is cleaner. I will often anchor alongside the rock and cast lures towards it as the tide recedes. As the tide turns to come in, I find trolling has been more successful with B52's and Killalure barra baits working particularly well. The rock along with Shoal Bay in general produces many metre-plus fish during the build-up. It also has many fish in the 80's and 90's and so is an extremely popular place to fish at this time of year.

These areas also work well during the spring tides as the tidal variation increases. Most anglers prefer to move up a creek or river on the high tide finding a deep hole to lock into over the low tide. Live bait works well in this situation, but lures have still accounted for many fish landed especially during the low tide when fish are trapped in these areas. One of the best times for fishing these holes is just as the tide first comes in and enters the hole. Big schools of mullet usually move in at this time and it's not uncommon to see barra smashing bait during this phase of the tide.

Another 90 plus barra taken at the rock trolling a gold Killalure Barrabait







**Sam Errity landed this solid fish trolling a big B52 on the first of the incoming tide in Shoal Bay**

## DARWIN HARBOUR

You don't need to travel far to get into some hot build up action. Darwin Harbour is an extensive waterway that encompasses several estuaries with many creeks and arms to fish and every year produces some quality fishing. There are several boat ramps available to use at most times during the tide that give full access to this productive area.

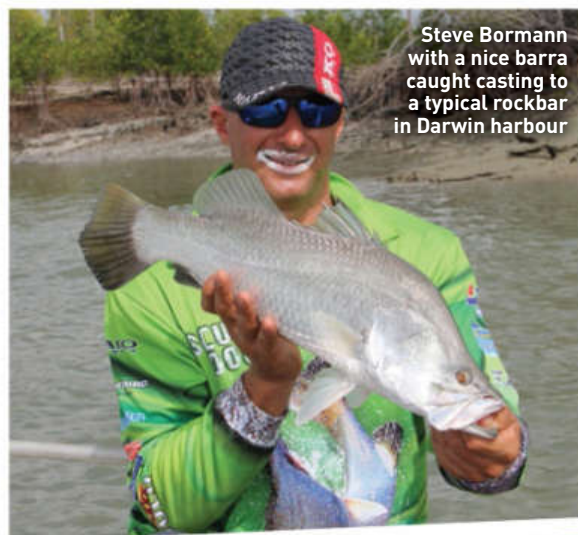
Generally spring tides work better in Darwin Harbour when targeting barramundi. The topography is totally different to Shoal Bay with many more flats, snake drains and gutters to fish. The areas generally fish better during the spring tides with more movement. The last two hours of the outgoing tide can be productive as the bait is flushed out of the snake drains and gutters and onto the flats.

I find that smaller lures work well in Darwin Harbour as generally the bait fish around are much smaller. Small Bombers and Junior B52'S work well on the flats in shallower water along with other deeper diving small minnows such as Barra Classic 97's and Reidys Little Lucifers when working drop offs around gutters into the main channel. Rock bars and timber also hold fish in the harbour and can be targeted on neap tides when the water clarity improves.

Jelly prawns are one of the most common food sources in the harbour during the build-up. After a few storms have hit the area they seem to breed up in big numbers and are definitely one of the main food sources for the barramundi. It's not uncommon to see hordes of barra

and threadfin salmon feeding on the flats and snake drains when the jelly prawns are around although they are notoriously difficult to catch when they're feeding on these small prawns. However, I find perseverance and sometimes the use of extremely small plastics can quite often produce results.

During the neap tides it is better to troll over rock bars and also along the edge of the mangroves as the tide rises. Rock bars in Middle Arm, West Arm, Elizabeth River and Woods Inlet are certainly worth targeting. Casting to timber in the upper reaches of these arms can also produce fish as the tide pushes in. The most common size range of barramundi in Darwin Harbour is around 55-65cm however it's not uncommon to come across metre-plus fish.



**Steve Bormann with a nice barra caught casting to a typical rockbar in Darwin harbour**



**Terry Doley with a great barra from Darwin harbour taken casting to the sticks behind him**



## LOCATION: NT BUILD UP HOTSPOTS

Steve hooked up on a good fish in one of the creeks in Bynoe harbour



Trevor Robb caught this metrey on a Classic 3+ trolling a tidal creek in Bynoe

Andrew Lamberton and a solid barra taken trolling in Bynoe during the neap tides



## BYNOE HARBOUR

Bynoe Harbour is another extensive waterway that features many arms and is just south of Darwin Harbour. It too can be accessed from several boat ramps at most times during the tide. Most ramps are around a 90 minute drive from Darwin. Milne Inlet boat ramp is probably the best ramp to use as it can be accessed with only 2.5m of water. Milne is also a great place to start when fishing Bynoe. It offers myriad creeks, gutters, snake drains and flats to fish. Once again Bynoe fishes better for barra during the spring tides when the bait and barra are flushed out of the mangroves as the tide recedes. There are also plenty of rock bars in Bynoe up the rivers and creeks and around Indian Island situated in the middle of the harbour and most of them fish well.

The main rivers that flow into Bynoe include the Charlotte and Annie Rivers situated in the eastern end of this waterway. These rivers have extensive rock bars that fish well for barra on the neap and spring tides. Target barra here over the neap tides and I find it's best to troll lures over them near the turn of the high tide. They also fish well on spring tides right on the low tide and during the first push of the incoming

tide. If trolling is not your thing, casting will produce the bite's you're after as well. Once again use lures according to the time of tide and the depth of water you are fishing. When the tide is full, deeper diverging lures work well when bounced over the rock bars. Make sure they come into contact with the rocks as often you will see the barra on your sounder holding tight to the structure. Once again if hard bodies do not work then try bouncing soft plastics and vibes across the rock bar.

During the spring tides, make sure you target the snake drains and gutters during the last of the outgoing tide and the first of the incoming tide. This is the prime time to catch barramundi as they gather in these areas to feed on various bait fish and jelly prawns. Fly fishing is also extremely popular in Bynoe Harbour with several fishing guides exclusively working this area during the build-up. The extensive flats around Indian Island provide plenty of areas for fly fishers to target with sight fishing a popular method. Bynoe generally has larger barra than Darwin Harbour with many fish in the 70's and 80's landed during the build-up and you're also much more likely to land a metre-plus fish than in Darwin Harbour.



Tony Errity with a 99cm barra taken on a green Bomber casting the flats in Bynoe



## SALTWATER ARM AND THE MOUTH OF THE ADELAIDE RIVER

This is another extremely popular area to fish at this time of year. Most people access it from the Saltwater Arm ramp, about an hour's drive from Darwin. Be aware that there is at least 45km of unsealed road into this ramp and conditions can be ordinary at times. The mouth of the Adelaide can also be accessed from a ramp well upstream on the river on the Arnhem highway. This is about 90km from the mouth whereas the Saltwater Arm ramp is only around 7km from the mouth.

Saltwater Arm itself is a large area that fishes similarly to both Darwin and Bynoe harbours. It has several arms encompassing plenty of flats, gutters and snake drains to fish over the spring tides. There are also sections towards the mouth that troll well during the neap tide phase when larger barra move into this system to feed. These areas are situated along deep edges and banks and often hold much timber that the fish shelter in during certain stages of the tide.

As you leave Saltwater Arm and head east towards the mouth of the Adelaide River, a distance of around 3km you will see you come across a well-known area called 'The Narrows'. This area has extensive rock bars that flank the mouth of the river on both sides. It is extremely popular during the neap tides to troll and flick this area for large barramundi that gather in to spawn and feed. The average sized fish encountered here is usually around 90cm with many metre-plus fish also landed.



**Braden Menzies with a solid barra landed at the mouth of the Adelaide. Note the beautiful green water experienced on a neap tide**



**The Spanyid vibe that accounted for a metre**

Trolling seems to account for most fish here. Troll along the edge of the rocks in 2-3m depth working your lure accordingly. Classic Barra 10+ lures work well in bright colour schemes such as guns and roses. Once again make sure your lure is worked right along the bottom bouncing over the rocks as often the fish will sit tight against the structure, out of the current waiting to ambush bait fish as they swim past.

On the outgoing tide, eddies will form in the

narrows along the rock walls. These are prime areas to target barra by casting to the eddies and working the area thoroughly as the tide recedes. Barra will move into these areas and float around for a while looking for an easy feed before moving on. Vibes and soft plastics can also work well in this situation. Jewfish are also regularly encountered here when fishing for barramundi and can provide some great fun on barra tackle with their blinding runs.

***"Catching a 90cm barra here would barely raise an eyebrow!"***



**The author with a solid fish trolled up on a long shot Bomber at the mouth of the Adelaide**



### LEADERS CREEK

Last but not least is one of my favourite areas to fish during the build-up. Leaders Creek can be accessed from a public ramp and is around the same distance (80km) from Darwin as Saltwater Arm. It is regularly accessible over most tides just like Saltwater Arm ramp. However, there is a fishing base operating at Leaders Creek and the operators there provide a boat launching and retrieving service for a small fee whilst providing a secure lock-up for your vehicle and boat trailer while you are away fishing for the day.

I prefer to fish Leaders Creek during the neap tides when the water clarity improves. I target the area near the mouth and troll deeper diving lures along the bank. Lures that swim from 3-4m are preferable and they must be worked right across the mud bottom where most barra seem to sit in this area of the creek. Once again a good sounder is essential. I have found that when the tide is higher the barramundi are more likely to be found further up the river about 500m from the mouth. However, as the tide drops away the barra seem to move towards the mouth where they often school up right on the low tide.

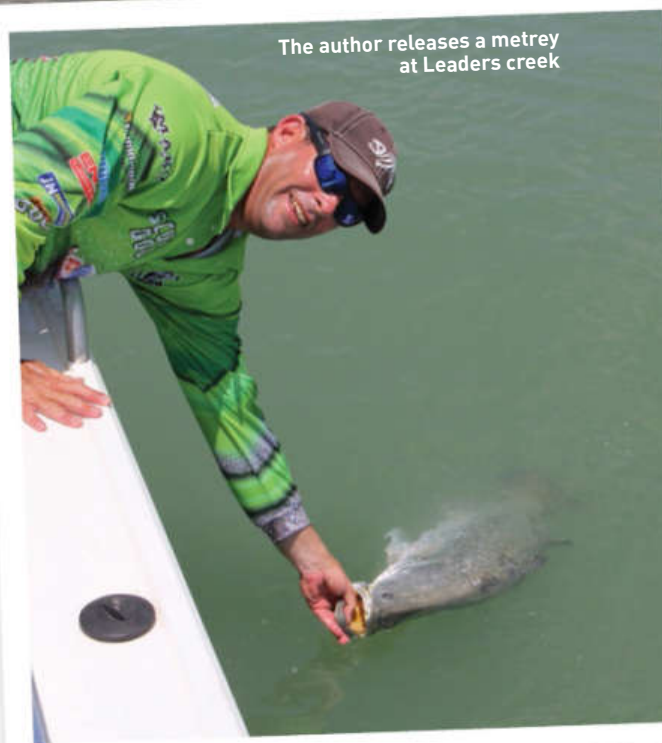
I've had great success working my lures slowly across the mud when trolling here. For some reason the barra sit right on the bottom on the edge of the channel as they move in or out of the creek on the tide. I have rarely seen them any higher in the water column on my sounder. Once again jewfish are common here too



A big barra tries to shake a Classic 10+ guns n roses


and regularly take a lure when trolled through the area.

Leaders also fishes well during the spring tides when drains and flats are targeted, but the general size of the fish encountered is much smaller. I prefer to work the neap tides where I have regularly encountered barra in the 80-90cm range. It is similar to Shoal Bay and the mouth of the Adelaide where larger barra are encountered as they gather in these areas to spawn. Barramundi change sex from male to female at around 90cm in length. Larger metre-plus females can be found with many more stud males around 70-90cm in length. There are always more males around during spawning than females and so this is one of the reasons why less metre-plus fish are encountered.



The author releases a metre+ at Leaders creek

***“The build-up signals mature male and female barra to gather around the mouths and rockbars”***

The build-up is a great time to target barramundi in the estuaries of the NT and the best part is there's no need to travel too far from the Capital city. Summing up, on neap tides target the mouths of rivers and creeks trolling deep banks and rocky ledges. Larger fish are usually encountered around the top of the tide. Deeper diving lures and vibes work well in this situation. During the spring tide phase as the tidal movement increases switch to fishing snake drains, gutters and flats. Shallower diving lures and small soft plastics work better in this situation. Fish the last couple of hours of the outgoing tide and the first couple of hours of the incoming. 



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# WAKING THE DEAD

**Norbs lifts the lid on wakebaits, the latest surface craze sweeping the Murray cod community**

WORDS BY DEAN NORBIATO IMAGES BY DEAN NORBIATO, AARON HILL AND MATT DANIEL



## TOPWATER COD TECHNIQUES

**M**y unhealthy obsession with surface fishing for Murray cod has led me to try every type of top water lure imaginable. I have trolled through hours of videos on YouTube and invested gigabytes of data researching new and inventive lures equipped to score a green machine off the surface.

Like all fishing fixations you strive to keep one step ahead of the pack by continuously challenging what you've done in the past. Much to the detriment of my bank balance, I have sampled every type of surface lure under the Australian sun including paddlers, walkers, stickbaits, buzzbaits, fizzers and buoyant soft plastics. The only type that had eluded me, due to a lack of real presence on the Australian market, was a wakebait.

These shad-like lures, made popular by muskie fishermen in North America, are characterised by a short flat bib that juts down from the chin of the lure. This means they don't dive under the water, but snake tantalizingly through the water's surface leaving a fish-calling 'V' in their wake – hence the name, wakebait.

After a barrage of research, it was an opportunistic encounter that saw me stumble across my first cod-capable wakebait. I was tearing up the tarmac, traveling from Melbourne to Canberra and decided to stop in at the Compleat Angler in Lavington, halfway into my drive.

After perusing the lure wall I heard a boisterous local come steaming in the door wielding a lure all tangled in braid. At the top of his voice he proceeded to tell anyone willing to listen that he needed some braid scissors to cut free "the best cod surface lure in Australia".

With that magical phrase ringing in my ears, I quickly shuffled on over and struck up a conversation with the animated character. Lucky for me he was a friendly chap sharing not only stories about the lure, but a host of eye-popping pictures on his phone to validate his tall tales.

As I picked my jaw up off the tackle shop floor he finally told me the lure, which I had never seen before, was a one-piece 130mm Shimano Triple Impact wakebait. He also offered some sage advice, recommending a mandatory upgrade on their terminal tackle, as he had been 'pulled to pieces' a couple of times on their standard trebles.

With this newfound knowledge, I exited the tackle shop and quickly punched the lure name into Google and located, then purchased, my maiden wakebait.

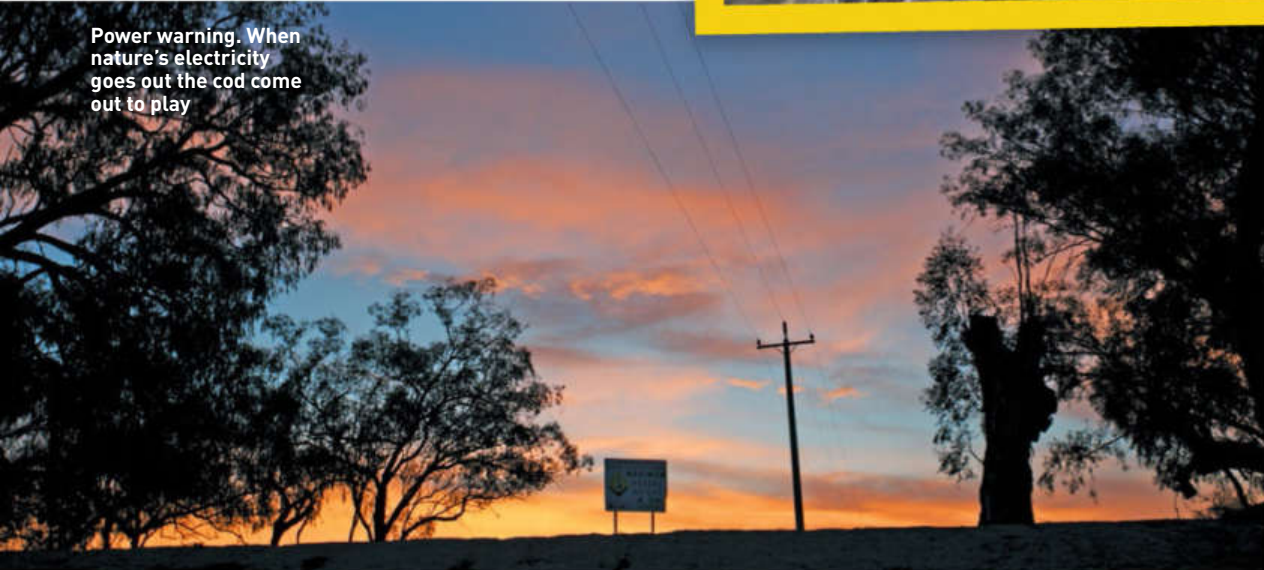


A birds eye view of a metre plus wakebait crunching Murray cod


The small blunt bib of a wakebait juts straight down from the chin of the lure to generate its customary wake across the surface



**Power warning.** When nature's electricity goes out the cod come out to play







Wake this way.  
Aaron Hill snared  
this beautifully  
marked Murray cod  
on a Jackall Mikey

***"I exited the tackle shop and quickly punched the lure name into Google and located, then purchased, my maiden wakebait"***

## **FIRST IMPRESSIONS LAST**

After ambushing the postman at my mailbox four days later I was finally in possession of two 130mm Shimano Triple Impacts. It wasn't long before I planned a trip to the river with good friend Aaron Hill, to churn the water to foam, testing our new topwater tucker.

The first thing I noticed when using these lures, compared to other floating favourites, was the big 'V' they throw out the back when they bubble and bulge through the surface film. I know in certain US tournament scenes they are also referred to as V-wakebaits for this very reason.

As we tinkered with different retrieves my Triple Impact was unceremoniously torpedoed two feet into the air by an angry adolescent cod. Before I had time to take another breath the lure was smacked three more times. The aggression towards the new wakebait was like nothing I had witnessed before.

It was at that point I realised I had a new weapon in my surface fishing arsenal. Over the coming sessions we really started to work out the best methods and areas to use these new baits. We also invested time in working out the best retrieval speeds and rod angles to achieve maximum action from the lure type.



## MASTERCLASS

Matt Perdrau is without question one of the country's premier Murray cod fishermen. The ACT-based angler, who is sponsored by Evergreen lures, has been flicking top water lures for Murray cod for well over a decade and has one of the best fishing brains in the business.

Matty is also a massive advocate of these surface snaking lures and shares with us his top five wakebait tips.

### 1.) THINK BIG

With all surface lures, but particularly wakebaits, think BIG! You're trying to imitate a cod's natural surface prey that includes mice, rats, lizards and water birds.

Wakebaits cause less commotion and disturbance than other surface lures (walkers and fizzers) which is the prime reason to use a wakebait that has a big presence in the water.

### 2.) THE NEED FOR SPEED

Get to know your wakebaits optimum retrieve speed. Find the speed at which it has the best action whilst remaining buoyant, this is when your wake bait is most appealing to a cod.

Once you've found that sweet spot, fish the lure with a continuous retrieve. I prefer not to pause the lure but instead speed it up with a fast single crank of the reels handle every couple of metres just to mix it up.

### 3.) NATURAL SELECTION

Make your wakebaits entrance to the water as natural as possible by purposefully casting it up onto rocks, stumps or bank ledges then sliding or dropping it into the water. After all you're trying to imitate a terrestrial animal's presence on the water.



A bruising 95cm Murray cod that smashed Matt Perdrau's wakebait at his feet

### 4.) THE COLOUR RUN

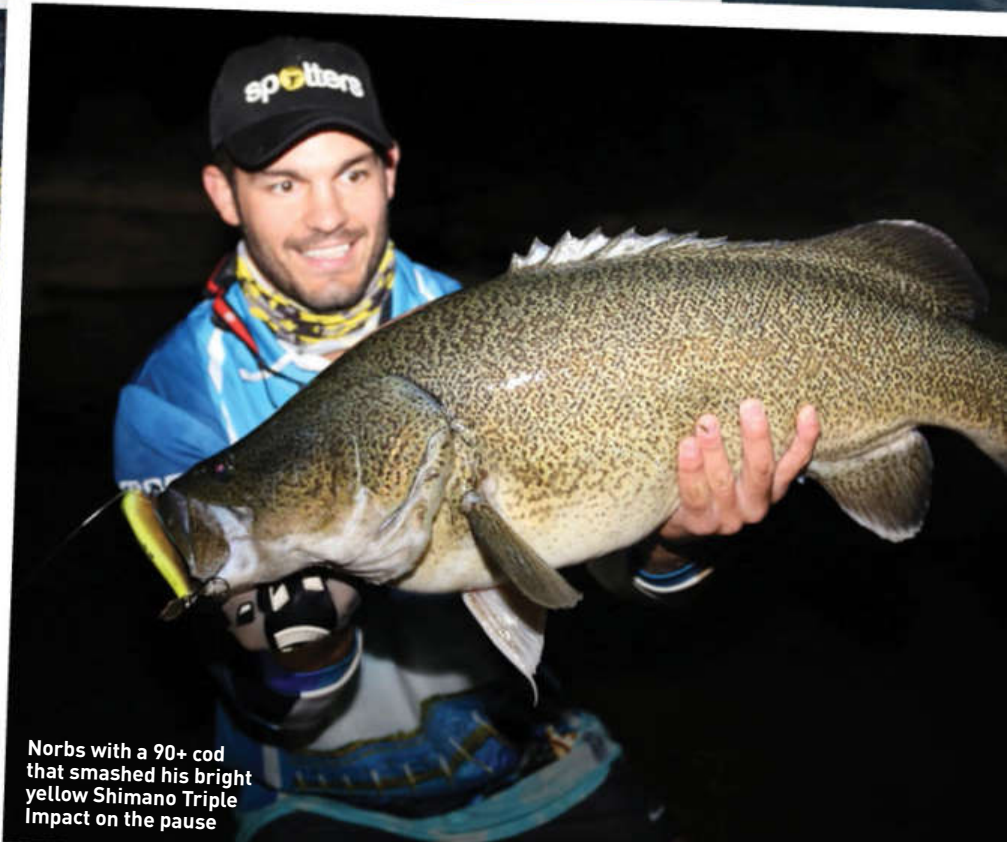
At night the colour of your wakebait can be critical. I prefer white or bright (fluoro) colours on the full moon as they reflect the available light, making the lure more visible. On the dark (new moon) I opt for dull colours like black, purple or red, which silhouettes better in the low light.

### 5.) CORNER STORAGE

Wakebait (and other surface lure) storage can be difficult due to their size and shape. There are a lot of good tackle trays/boxes on the market however it's hard to go past the Black Magic Deep Utility tray. Coupled with treble hook protectors on your lures, this box offers the best storage for a weekend's supply of wakebait and surface lures.

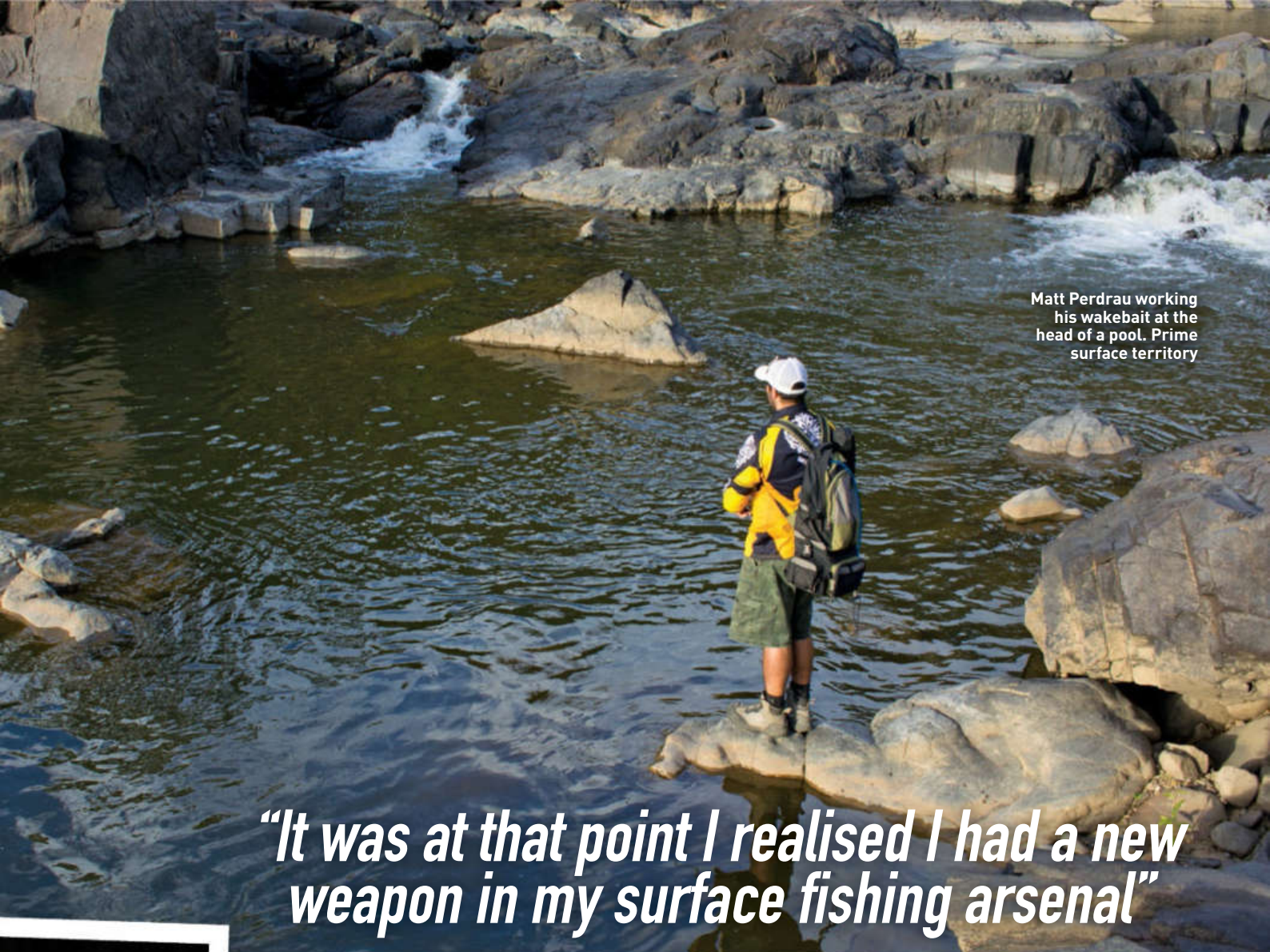


Wakey wakey. A selection of sleepy wakebaits ready to be cranked into action



Norbs with a 90+ cod that smashed his bright yellow Shimano Triple Impact on the pause





Matt Perdrau working his wakebait at the head of a pool. Prime surface territory

***"It was at that point I realised I had a new weapon in my surface fishing arsenal"***

## ANGLER'S ANGLE

When it comes to working a wakebait through the surface, each make and model requires a slightly different retrieve to get the best out of the lure. As a general rule you should always test out a new wakebait during the daylight hours, so you can adjust and tune your retrieve to get the best snaking action.

With all new wakebaits I like to test them with the rod held at a 45-degree angle to the water, to keep them from digging in and diving under the surface. Some models do this better than others, but it generally only takes a couple of casts to determine the best angle for each lure.

Certain models also come with additional fish attracting components like fizzers, rattles and trailing blades. My personal favourite is a trailing fizzer that sits between the back tow point and the rear treble. This oscillating fizzer blade adds an extra dimension to the lure, omitting a noisy ticking sound that rings a loud dinner bell for any hungry Murray cod in the vicinity.

These auxiliary items all contribute to the buoyancy and action of the lure. As a result each lure will have its own unique surface signature in the water. Ideally, you want your wakebait to be as buoyant as possible so it carves out the biggest fish-calling 'V' in the water. Some US bass anglers have taken this to the extreme by boiling their wakebaits, so they expand and become even more buoyant.

## WAKE THIS WAY

Like their buoyant brethren's, you can pause and prop wakebaits just like your traditional paddlers and walkers. While the lure will get inhaled on the pause I receive the most heart-skipping strikes employing a swift, methodic roll back to the rod tip.

Speed wise I like to retrieve my wakebaits faster than your traditional paddlers, but slower than the hypercrank needed when using a buzzbait. I find that this cadence, akin to a brisk walking pace, generates the largest 'V' in the water, creating a real hone in point for the Murray cod to track and attack.

The addition of a stop start motion on a standard brisk retrieve, by simply flicking down the rod tip from its 45-degree position, will see the lure zip off either left or right. This sporadic action closely resembles the darting action of a wounded baitfish and is great when working slack water under an overhang.

As with all surface fishing, no matter what retrieve you use it's paramount you work your wakebait right to your feet, as it's not uncommon for a Murray cod to detonate on your lure as it is being pulled from the water.

It's also good to keep a few lengths of line in the water, at least a leader worth, when you pull the lure off the top. If you don't have ample line in the water and are smacked by a last ditch strike you run the risk of snapping a rod tip or busting a leader, as there is not enough 'give' between you and the fish.



Also, once you receive the initial knee-buckling boof, don't immediately start your retrieve, instead continue to bob the wakebait on the spot. While missed hook ups are not uncommon, it is rare for a cod to have only one swipe at the lure and not come back and finish it off. Letting your lure rest on the water's surface can be easier said than done, as you have to contend with an oversupply of adrenaline rapidly flooding your system.

Again, like all surface fishing it's important that you don't strike at a boof like you would with a sub-surface hit. It is best to employ a 'dead stick' to the strike and not arc into the action to early.

Put simply, playing a 'dead stick' on a surface strike means waiting for the fish to generate a load in the rod, before you rip in and fully set the hooks. Again, a sudden spike in adrenaline will make this significantly harder than it sounds.

***"The aggression towards the new wakebait was like nothing I had witnessed before"***



The Evergreen Timber Flash wake bait did the damage on this metre beating Murray cod



Fan Favourite. The Jackall Mikey is one of the most successful wakebaits available on the Australian market

## WICKED WAKEBAITS

As the popularity of this form of surface lure grows so too will the amount of options available on the Australian market. While any surface smacking species like Australian bass right through to trevally and even bream will fall victim to a well-worked wakebait, it is the XOS models that are best suited for Murray cod.

They are available in either a single or jointed model, with the single body varieties like the Shimano Triple Impact, best used when you need a silent, natural presentation. The jointed models that can have anywhere from three to six segments generate more commotion, as their segments click and clack together during the retrieve.

Like most overseas imports you may need to upgrade the terminal tackle to make sure they are cod-strong. Not only will you need to upgrade the trebles but also pay close attention to the standard split rings that come with each model.

Another tip to give your wakebait extra action is to slide a closed ring onto the front toe point split ring. You then connect your leader, via a loop knot, to the closed ring which gives your wakebait more wobble on the water. The closed ring also stops the main line sliding through or nicking any sharp points of the split ring.

At present, while still hard to come by, these are some of the stand out wakebait options available to Australian customers.

*Jackall Mikey  
Jackall Back Bone Clicker  
Shimano Triple Impact 130mm/140mm  
Evergreen Timber Flash  
LiveTarget Mullet Wakebait*





## THE GREAT ALL-ROUNDER

After investing an inordinate amount of time using wakebaits over the last few seasons it has become glaringly obvious that they are by far the most versatile surface lure on the market. They are just as deadly rolled across the main flow at the head of a pool, as they are slowly stopped and propped in brackish backwater.

Their big advantage over other conventional surface lures is they take characteristics from each model and combine them into one formidable all-rounder. In a nutshell, they have the buoyancy of a paddler style lure and can be worked at high speeds like a sinking buzzbait.

This versatility means that you don't have to switch your lure if the conditions suddenly change. This point was rammed home on a recent trip to the 'Bidgee when I shared a walk with Aaron Hill along a new stretch of river.

Hilly was fishing a Jackall Mikey wakebait and I had a Bassman buzzbait. As we rounded a new bend I spotted a prime overhang, created by a forlorn looking willow

that just screamed cod. As I quickly rummaged through my tackle box, looking for a floating surface walker to thoroughly work the area, Hilly rifled his wakebait to the back of the darkened alcove.

With fumbling fingers I attempted to tie the knot blind, as my eyes were fixated on his wakebait, as he painstakingly worked the lure into open water. It wasn't fair, I had seen the spot first but my sinking buzzbait was not suited to slowly massaging over the area on the top.

Just as I clinched the loop knot on my jointed Mudeye Popeye surface walker, a bathtub worth of water was caved out from beneath his wakebait by a hulking greenfish.

While the trebles failed to find flesh, much to Hilly's dismay, the encounter added further weight to the debate of them being the most versatile surface lure on the market. It is for this reason that I also think a wakebait is a brilliant introductory lure for any greenhorn angler looking to take up this highly addictive form of Murray cod fishing.



Winter is a great time to bust out the wakebaits as Rory Benn-Clibborn proved with this topwater tank



### WAKY, WAKY

Like all most of surface fishing it is best to ply your trade during the night or low light periods. It is during these dimly lit periods, under the guise of darkness that Murray cod will hunt more freely on the top.

With a dark blanket of cover, the mottled monsters will leave their lairs actively hunting for an easy meal. From experience, the three most productive areas of a waterway to target Murray cod with wakebaits are flowing water, under darkened overhangs and around mid-water structure.

When it comes to fishing a wakebait in fast flowing water it is always best to cast up stream and work your lure back at a 45-degree angle across the current. Working your wakebait downstream will not only present your lure more naturally, but also give you better control of your retrieve speed.

Shadowy canopies, created by outstretched branches and flora that hangs over the water, are prime locations to target a Murray cod on the surface. These generally shady areas provide that extra blanket of cover for an ambushing fish to sit higher in the water column.

The canopy of cover will also supply a constant stream of surface fodder that falls from its limbs, which is perfect for an opportunistic surface feeder like a Murray cod.

Mid water structure can take the shape of any natural or manmade object, from a rock boulder to a bridge pylon. Murray cod don't tend to discriminate against the type of the structure, as long as it provides an adequate ambush point for them to hide and attack.

Again, look to cast your wakebait up stream of the mid water object and work it back at a 45-degree angle so it swims seductively past the topside corner of the structure. Slowly work your casts closer and closer to the snag, so you end up just clipping the structure on your final pass.

Sunset, the perfect time to wake the dead



Steve from Croaker Lures with a bucket mouthed goodoo that took a liking to one of his custom made wakebaits

This fiesty little cod smashed this snaking Jackall Mikey at the authors feet



### WAKE WEAPONRY

As most Murray cod wakebaits are above 10cm in length and 30gm in weight, it is best that you have a rod and reel that can handle repetitive casts with large lures. To ward off shoulder fatigue and help ensure I land the most accurate casts possible I opt for a stiff 4kg-8kg graphite rod standing around 2m tall, with a fast taper, like the Nitro Upgrader or 13 Fishing Omen series. For the bigger wakebaits like the 18cm and 56gm Evergreen Timber Flash, a heavier rod in the 6kg-8kg bracket is best.

I like to pair my graphite rod with a low profile baitcaster with at least 5kg of cod-stopping drag. I'm currently using a Shimano Chronarch ci4+ spooled to the brim with 15kg Sunline PE braid and I'm pretty happy with the set-up.

When chucking wakebaits around in cod country I opt to up the ante of my leader and use a rod length of 18kg Jinkai Plus. The larger leader size, up from 15kg to 18kg, also gives me the added insurance when flicking in the dark, as I inevitably end up skimming my leader through branches and bouncing it off rocks.

When joining heavy leader to braid I like to keep it simple and I either tie an improved Albright knot or an FG knot. While the FG can be tricky to tie the first few times it is a great, slender joining knot to tie with larger profile lines. Like all leaders make sure you don't wind the knot onto your spool, as the constant knocking of the knot on the level wind will quickly work it free.



Surface guru Matt Perdrau with a small topwater caught cod that smashed his Evergreen Timber Flash

***"If you haven't already, 'wake' up and add a few to your arsenal"***

Open wide. It's a wakebait inside

## RISE AND SHINE

Murray cod are the prized jewel in our freshwater fishing crown. Catching them on a surface lure is universally recognized as the most exhilarating way to tame these bulldozing beasts.

While wakebaits are the new kids on the block when it comes to surface cod candy, they are quickly gaining shelf space on their compatriots. Whether you are a novice to this form of fishing or have been churning the surface to foam for years, you should, if you haven't already, 'wake' up and add a few to your arsenal. **MF**



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# WHY RUN WHEN YOU CAN FLY?

Thinking of challenging yourself with a fishing technique that pays real dividends for expertise? Then fly fishing's the one for you. It's different, it's fun, and very effective

WORDS AND IMAGES BY WAYNE KAMPE



**W**hile there are many interesting options for today's keen angler, it's always the ongoing challenge that seems to be the attraction. Fly fishing certainly offers plenty of challenges given the number of fish species that are taken with the long wand these days and once mastered it seems there's always

another species to conquer.

There's no denying that fly fishing has diversified in a big way from its commencement with trout several hundred years ago. In the salt everything from garfish to billfish can be caught on fly; in the sweet water everything from bass to barra are fly targets and there's myriad species in between and overlapping. And let's not forget the humble trout either.

Fly fishing today has moved well past the boundaries originally set by trout but the legacy of imitating things that fish eat with a fly not only lives on but seems to be ever increasing. The reality is that if a fish eats anything that can be imitated – or represented- with a fly he's fly rod fodder. And whether the fly is formed from fur, feathers, synthetic material or a tricky mix of all items, if a fish takes the offering he's been caught on fly!

Making it all so easy is the internet with it's wealth of information and techniques. When I bought my first fly rod four decades ago I had to buy a book to find out information, today a click of the mouse reveals all. Good old Mr Google!

Just like most other styles of fishing today, fly fishing requires specialised tackle but there's nothing special about specialised tackle. These days it's fairly standard: look at Egi gear, finesse plastic outfits. Precisely matching balanced tackle is certainly part of today's fishing ethos but with fly fishing, things are taken a couple of steps further although it still comes down to a rod, a reel and a line designed to



Our bass are fond of flies, these smaller ones are ideal for river fish, the larger ones among them ideal for impoundment work

work in perfect harmony. All are intended to make things as easy and enjoyable as possible for the angler.

Seeing as there is plenty of confusion regarding fly fishing fundamentals, I want to take the time to move through the basics that one needs to know before getting started. By the end of this article, you should be well and truly equipped to get out there and start casting spells with the long wand!

A solid Monduran barra was just reward for a morning of many casts



## CASTING ABOUT

With conventional bait and spin tackle there's varying degrees of mass at the terminal extremity that assists casting by loading the rod when casting. When fly casting, by contrast, it's the fly line that has the mass, not the fly. The caster uses the rod to lift the fly line into the air, which in turns bends (loads) the fly rod as the fly line extends to the rear, and with the forward stroke of the rod, the fly line is sent on its way.

As a fly line is tapered at its forward end, somewhat thicker behind the tapered section, (like a whip) it easily moves forward and away from the rod (or shoots as it's called) to deliver the fly. The distance travelled by the fly line, its speed of delivery and the manner of landing a fly on or in the water – quaintly referred to as the presentation – are all governed by the fly caster's input and timing of casting strokes

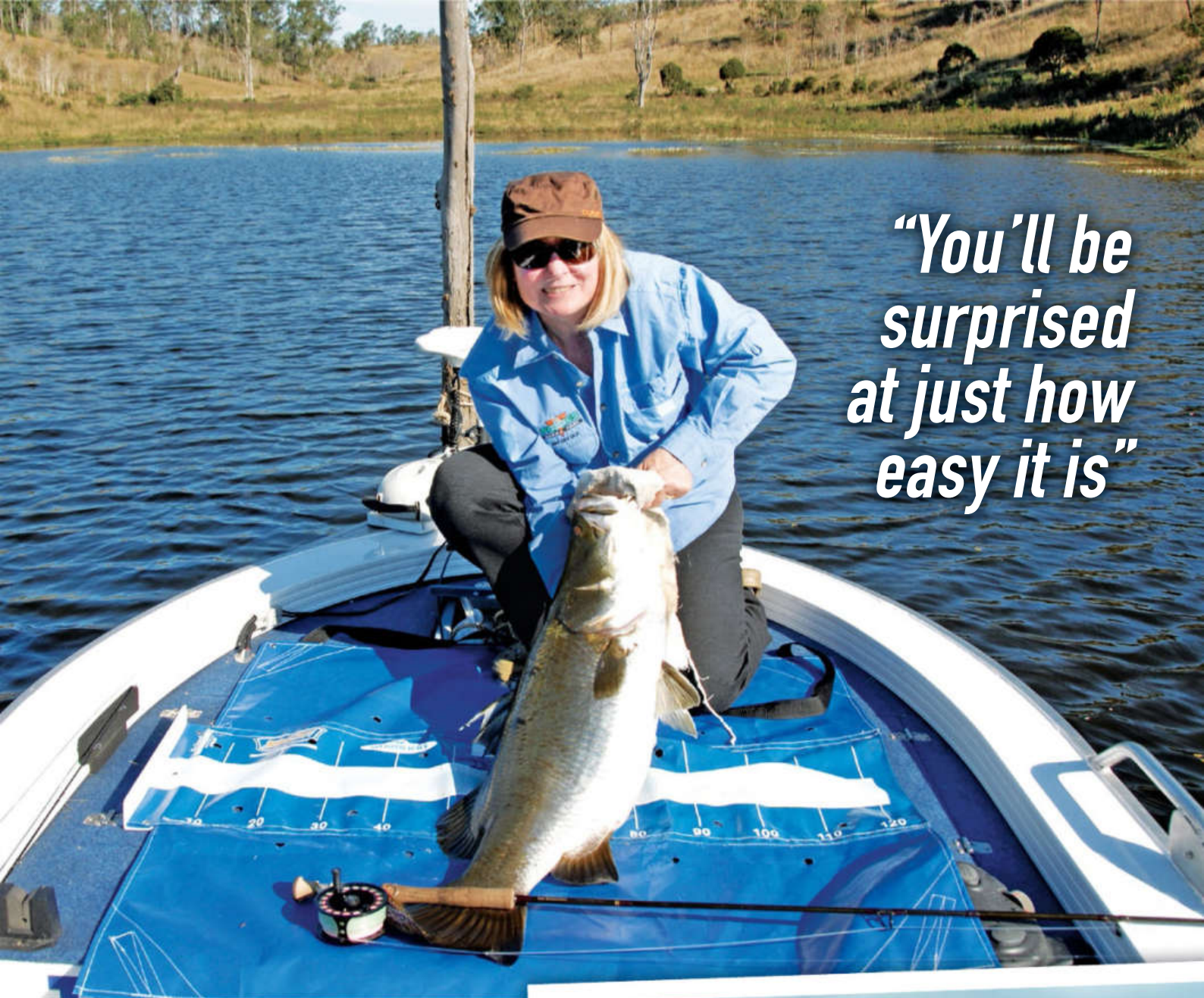


New and Old. A couple of Gudebrod loops on fly line ends. The connection on the bottom is around five years old but still going strong



Line to leader connections: topmost is a Gudebrod loop on 10 weight line, on the bottom a nail knot on a 5 weight trout line





***“You’ll be surprised at just how easy it is”***

## FLY LINE CLASSIFICATION

For the novice, it can be confusing to understand how fly tackle is classified because a fly rod does not feature lure weights and line classes on the butt like a conventional stick. Instead there’s a manufacturer’s ‘weight’ classification in lieu and this specifies which weight of fly line should be used with that rod. Nothing else.

The system of allocating a given weight to a fly line originated in the U.S where, incidentally, there are more fly anglers than there are people in Australia!

Being of U.S origin it has always been a non metric system and involves the first thirty feet (9.144m) of a selected fly line being weighed (on very precise scales) with the result obtained in grains rather than grams. A grain is 0.00647891 of a gram. The figure obtained then aligns in a scale covering line weights from 1 to 15, or more, according to the number of grains recorded.

For example, very light fly lines in sizes 3 and 4 weigh around 100 and 120 grains respectively for their assessed 30 feet, a 10 weight recording 280 grains, while a 15 – there’s a beast of a rod to cast – at 550 grains!

**Mangrove jack are an exciting proposition on fly!**





## THE RIGHT ROD FOR THE JOB

By now it should be pretty clear that there's no one-rod-fits-all in fly fishing just as there is none for conventional tackle as well although one outfit certainly can be used for a range of fish when assessing their size, power, likely size of the fly but there's always balance involved. While whiting rods don't take tuna, 5 weight fly rods don't take barra unless they are a long way from legal size.

Accordingly, trout rods are frequently from 4 through to 6 in weight and these weights can also be converted to saltwater species such as bream. Anglers chasing impoundment bass, flathead, tarpon and smaller tuna species would gravitate towards a 6 or 7 weight fly rod and line. Stepping further up to salt water and feisty tropical species, a powerful rod suited to barra, northern blue fin as well as good sized queenfish would likely be a 9 or 10 weight. Centrally in the scale an 8 weight is ideal for smaller trevally, jacks, bonefish, Australian salmon, smaller queenies and barra, plus sooty grunter.

A 7 or 8 weight fly outfit will tame small queenies like this one easily

Going right up the scale, a marlin or big tropical GT outfit might be based on 13, or 15 weight tackle. The higher the number the stronger and more solid the rod, the more powerful it is and the more effort is required to cast it.

The briefest of glances will show there's considerable difference in both thickness and strength between the sections of a five weight fly rod and a ten weight. Sections? Yes, most fly rods these days are of four piece construction which makes them very easy to transport in a short hard tube.

The choice of the right fly outfit for the task directly relates to the strength of the fish species targeted although fly size can also have an impact. If a fly is too bulky, despite the target fish being within the capability of the rod, it can hamper effective casting, especially in a breeze. A five weight fly outfit, very suited to playing trout, bream or bass would cast any trout fly from the box but struggle to cast a 1/0 Dahlberg Diver that a bass would relish. This deer hair fly would likely have too much air resistance and mass for the small rod to cast effectively and accurately unless the rod was in the hands of a very good caster.



Even a quick glance reveals that the ten weight rod uppermost is a lot larger in thickness than the five weight below

## THE GOOD OIL ON FLY LINES

A bit of on-line research rapidly reveals that there are quite a number of fly lines to choose from within any given weight category. It might seem a bit confusing yet taken piece by piece it again makes sense, the same as the rod/line compatibility system already discussed. Broadly speaking there are two main categories of fly lines right across the board. First are full floating lines, then their sinking counterparts.

Next, design configuration comes into the picture and we might also like to look at the terms weight forward

– WF – or double taper –DT – as noted on the box. The first means that the fly line has most of its tapered section towards the business end with a carefully designed level section behind it.

The second style sees a tapered section each end with a fairly short level section in the centre so if one section is worn out the line can be reversed and the fresh section used. A great concept but these days fly lines are far more durable and secondly WF lines cast so darned well they are almost universally used.





The author with a decent 'toga taken on 2/0 Gartside Gurgler



Highly versatile flies. Topmost two Toads, underneath Gartside Gurglers. Toads are brilliant wet flies and depending on size are great from bass to barra, and 'toga as well. Gartside Gurglers are one of the best all round dry flies for fresh water surface work

## FLOATERS

Floating fly lines are exactly as specified. They are intended to float and in doing so keep a dry fly on the surface or another style of fly close to it. Some flies – think of nymphs for trout – are designed to sit just under the surface.

A significant advantage of a floating line is that so much of it can be lifted straight off the water to make the next cast, extremely handy when a fish signals its whereabouts and you need to make a quick cast. Trout anglers also use their floating lines to work wet flies as streams are seldom very deep, and a little rub of mud on the leader sinks it nicely.

On balance, there is more use for a floating line in the fresh rather than the salt water situation although popper style flies at the business end of a floating line can be quite successful for taking fish such as barra, tarpon, tuna and queenfish.

## SINKERS

Sinking fly lines are favoured for a vast number of fly fishing situations. Interestingly, they are designed to sink at differing rates; again as specified. Some sinking lines are rated as having an intermediate sink rate – commonly around 3 to 5cm per second while others vary. A common sink rate appears to be around the 9.5cm to 17cm per second. That's pretty fast! There are also sink tip lines as well; these see the last few metres of the fly line sink below the surface while the rest floats.

## WHICH LINE?

So many fly lines but which one to use? It stands to reason that if the fly is intended to be right on, or very near to the surface and remain there (that's the kicker) a floating line's the one. Tarpon, trout, Murray cod, bass, barra at night or dawn, saratoga, sooties, bream on bread flies, these are common dry fly targets although others can be brought into the picture by the use of berley.

For most other fly fishing it's one of the sinking lines that will be exiting a rod tip's runner.

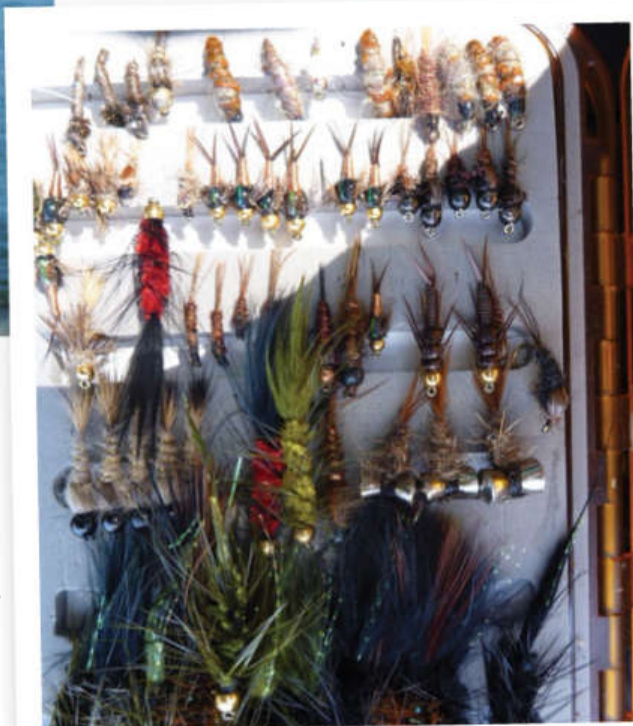
For the majority of the larger species, the real line burners like tuna, barra, macs, mega queenies, the intermediate line is usually the one for the job. Nearly always, it's a clear fly line that's delivering the fly as there's less chance of the fish spooking as the fly lands. Sudden shadows can be an issue.

The intermediate's slow sink rate also serves to keep the fly in the area of activity as the angler retrieves the fly line at best speed. Again, it needs to be nearly all retrieved to make the next cast. Incidentally, intermediate lines are very useful when chasing those bucket mouthed Murray cod. Cod on fly you say? You bet!

Lines with very fast sink rates are used when fish are holding deeper in the water column and this covers quite a few species in both the salt and fresh water environment. Snapper – when berleyed- are deep fly targets these days as are bream, flathead, school mackerel, tuna, mangrove jacks, threadfin salmon and sooties. Big barra and mega impoundment bass being targeted in the dams can often be found schooling deep so fast sink rates can pay dividends here also.



Wet trout flies can vary considerably in size but all can be used on a floating line after the leader has been rubbed with a little mud to remove all floatant





## CASTING CLUES

Learning to cast is like learning any hands-on skill - practice makes perfect. Firstly obtaining balanced tackle is vital: good gear goes good. Looking at some on-line tutorials will show what's required, then it's time to put it into practice. You've got the gear and you can't wait to use it anyway.

Many beginners like to start with the fly line always in clear sight to ensure that both back and forward casts are correctly timed from the outset. The idea is to lay a few metres of fly line (with a leader) on the lawn then point the rod out at right angles to the line, so that each casting stroke can be observed. Stepping back a tad will keep the rod tip and line in sight which is important.

First step is to flick the line back with the rod tip quite low, stopping the rod with a sharp squeeze on the hand grip and snappy stop of the wrist when it's at round 2 o'clock. If there's the right amount of power the fly line should be just as far back as it was in front and still at right angles to the rod tip if the quick lift and sharp stop are done correctly.

Pause, then flick it forward in the same manner, again stopping it abruptly at about 10 o'clock. All going well, the line should be laying straight out after each movement and with very little or no slack. Slack inhibits casting so avoid it.

With confidence increasing, the idea is to gently let a bit more line out - keep casting the line back and forth on the ground and watching how things are going while noting the extra power and slowed down timing required to keep it travelling sweetly.

Before long the rod and line can be elevated and cast in a normal manner using the same system of power, stroke and timing. It's always interesting to see how much more power is required as extra line is being cast. Progressing slowly is the clue; stopping when tired or when timing is becoming shot is very important. Later, casting on water and experiencing the difference that water tension makes will be an eye opener.

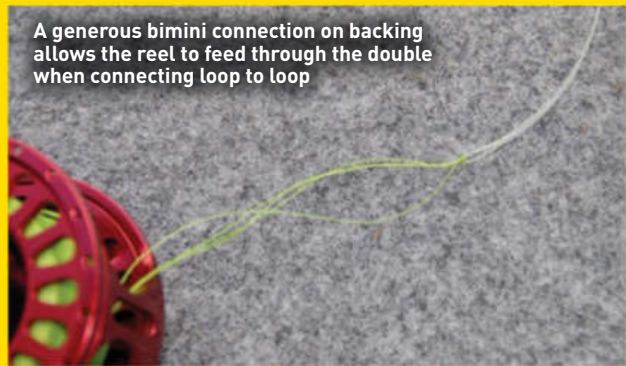
Once casting is mastered it makes sense to fish in areas that are familiar, where the fish and their habits have already been sussied out from using conventional tackle. That's going to be a head start to that all important milestone first fish on fly. Next milestone, incidentally, will be the fish you caught on a fly you've tied yourself and there is something truly rewarding about that!

***"Learning to cast is like learning any hands-on skill - practice makes perfect"***



A 10 weight rod and reel plus an intermediate line saw the author bag this northern blue, or longtail tuna

A generous bimini connection on backing allows the reel to feed through the double when connecting loop to loop



## LEADER AND BACKING CONNECTIONS

A fly line straight from the box needs a tapered leader plus connection to backing. Tapered leaders can be either purchased or home spun with many anglers buying a couple at first then deciding to make their own by joining selected thicknesses of line - Penn 10X is good - with the concept of continuing a taper right down to the final tippet section where the fly is tied. A short anti-bite off section can be incorporated here if chasing larger prey that may cause chafing on the leader.

If the new fly line has a loop on the extremities, leader connection is as simple as a loop knot but where there's no loop, two main methods are used to connect leader and fly line.

For lighter fly lines (3 to 8 weight) a Nail Knot is perfect, with the wonderful Google offering plenty of details on how to get it done. Alternatively, the angler can form a small loop on the fly line's end, bind and whip finish it, and apply a couple of coats of nail varnish (try Sally Hanson's Hard As Nails) before the leader is tied on.

For larger fly lines where some serious tug of war is likely, a Gudebrod sleeve connection is favoured. Mr Google can no doubt show how this is done too

Connecting leader and backing is greatly simplified when the fly line has factory loops at both ends





## THE REEL

Choosing a reel for fresh water work usually only comes down to the depth of your pocket as there are so many available. A smooth, easily adjusted drag is important, as is backing capacity as even a trout reel needs at least 50 metres behind the fly line.

Salt water is very hard on gear so reels need to be of definite salt water capability and built to last. Spending the money on a one off purchase of a popular brand of quality, heavy duty large arbor salt water reel with a powerful yet smooth drag makes sense.

The reels size should be carefully selected based on the likely targets and also the weight of the rod being used. A fly reel helps to balance the outfit while casting so it's important that weights are matched up well. If you're looking to target fast fish that are capable of long runs, make sure you've got a good 2-300 metres of backing on there. Generally speaking, the size of reel should be of the same rating as the rod and line. Easy!



A basic fly tying kit won't break the bank but can provide endless hours of enjoyment




Flies as small as these size 16's rely on the fly line's technology to take them to the fish

## FLIES: BUY OR TIE?

Whether you make or buy your flies really depends on opportunity and seeking to become more involved in the sport. It's true, too, that tying flies extends an aspect of fly fishing to the home which is satisfying. A rudimentary fly tying kit of a fly vice plus associated hand tools won't harm the wallet too much and if the local fly store doesn't have the required material then it's certainly available on line. True, too, that there are so many really good fly tying tutorials on line that the fly angler has never had it better.

Now I'll share something. Virtually all of the larger flies shown in the accompanying images are tied by yours truly. They might look pretty rough but they all catch fish! Never assume a fly needs to be store perfect to succeed! And never assume you need to make a perfect cast to catch a fish.

So gear up, practice that casting, and see what challenges and fulfilment the world of fly fishing can bring to your life. 



Scott Kampe looks pretty pleased with his dry fly caught brown trout



A selection of the author's barra flies: they look rough but are quite effective on an intermediate sink rate line





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# TALE OF TWO LAKES

Rather than his usual bluewater haunts, we sent Al off to the impoundments to report on the state of the stocked trout fishery

WORDS AND IMAGES BY AL MCGLASHAN





**T**hese days I don't do much trout fishing, instead most my focus is on venturing further and further to sea in pursuit of big pelagics and while catching big fish is all good, I really do miss the simple pleasures associated with the freshwater alternatives. Trout fishing in particular is something I really enjoy, it's not just the finesse style approach but the whole package, especially the scenery around some of our inland impoundments.

There is no doubt trout fishing is popular, a fact that was reiterated when I put out a call asking anyone and everyone what they would like to see me doing more of and trout fishing was right up there. Interestingly, it wasn't fly fishing instead the biggest interest was lure fishing, both trolling and spinning. This was all the encouragement I needed and quickly set about planning a road trip in search of some big browns.

Instead of exploring new waters I decided to go back to a couple of old favourites, namely Lake Eucumbene in the Snowy Mountains and Lake Eildon down in Victoria. I had fished these lakes regularly as a kid 'back in the old days' when I lived in Victoria but hadn't returned in more than a decade.

### EUCUMBENE BOUND

First stop was Eucumbene, Some four and bit hours south of Sydney it is arguably one of the country's most famous trout fisheries. I have fond memories visiting the lake with the old man staying at the aptly named Anglers Reach. In those days fishing was pretty basic and we divided the day up between trolling the main lake and soaking mudeyes under bubble floats along the bank. Success was varied and for the hours we put in I have to admit we didn't really do overly well, mind you it was probably to do with the fact we were fishing with snapper rods!

Part of the Snowy Mountains hydro scheme, it is a massive waterway with more than 220 kilometres of shoreline, which equates to nine times the volume of Sydney Harbour. Combine this with its high altitude - some 1200 metres above sea level and it makes for some ideal conditions for trout. However, having not visited the lake in years I decided to enlist a local expert and called in Nathan Walker from the Compleat Angler in Canberra. An accomplished fly fishing instructor, Nath loves his trout fishing and knew all the latest intel.

*"This place offers the best chance of a 10lb brown"*



A small female brown blends in incredibly well amongst the rocks



While a large brown doesn't so well due to his sheer size

A few days later with reports the spawn run was in full swing, we prepared to head down the hill. Everything was falling into place but then suddenly went haywire. First I had to pick up Yamaha's tinny and got stuck in Sydney's atrocious traffic. Traffic jams are standard so my three hour trip to Canberra quickly doubled in time. Now being a professional angler you would think that I would have patience and I do for a fish but not for Sydney's traffic and I was just about pulling my hair out before I had even got out of town!

Next stop was Canberra airport to collect Deano the camera man along with a Mount Everest of bags. Finding the cameraman was easy but parking was not so easy so foolishly I decided to do a pull up since there was no one else around and quickly load up. There was no one behind me so in theory it sounded great but seconds later the flashing blue lights suggested a different story. Now with a slight reduction in my savings account I figured things could only get better from here and when we finally arrived, a cold beer certainly brightened things up a bit.



Small minnows such as this Halco Laser Pro are very effective when trolled or cast in Eucumbene



## ON THE WATER

The following morning we were out early and snaking our way north from Anglers Reach through the mist towards the river mouth. The plan was to fish the entrance to the Eucumbene River based on the theory that with no rain the trout would be stacked up ready for the next migration up the river. Now in theory it sounded brilliant, but sadly no one had told the trout and they had all decided to go up the river anyway. Under normal circumstances this is fine because we would simply abandon the boat and walk up the river, however when you are making a TV show called Big Fish Small Boats, apparently you have to fish from a boat - bugger!

We flogged the river mouth for ages for absolutely zip before finally changing tact. One of my favourite ways to chase big brown trout is to spin the timber. Unlike rainbows that are more pelagic in nature, browns are very structure oriented and spend much of their time tucked in amongst the snags waiting to ambush passing prey. The technique employed is very similar to barra or bass fishing where it's all about actively stalking them in the snags. It is a very enjoyable way to fish and is more like hunting than simply fishing, better still it is one of the best ways to find trophy sized fish.



Al's pretty happy with this big male and why wouldn't you be!





Working our way down from the river mouth, we fished all the likely spots be it drowned timber or rocky edges. The first few spots were very slow but then I spied a lone stump jutting out on a steep rocky ledge. It just screamed fish and being the great bloke that I am, I steered the electric so that I would get the best cast and shouldered Nath out of the way in the process. It worked a treat and my favourite little Laser Pro landed right on the mark and got nailed instantly.

Straight away I realised it was a big fish and seconds later a flash of colour had me hooting and hollering in excitement while Dean (who had almost fallen asleep) madly scrambled to get the camera rolling.

Focusing on the fish I used the rod to steer it away from the timber and into the open. I expected the fish to jump but instead it slugged it out down deep, but with constant pressure I kept the upper hand. Finally one of the prettiest browns I had ever seen rolled over at the boat. It was a stomper of a fish lit up in all its pre-spawning glory and complete with a distinctly hooked lower jaw. Initially I was planning on keeping one for the smoker but seeing this fish soon had me changing my mind, it was simply too pretty to kill. After snapping the fish from all angles I carefully revived it and then with multiple cameras rolling sent it on its way to head up river. We kept fishing and caught a few more fish but that big buck made the whole trip worthwhile. It really is amazing how one good fish suddenly makes all the hard work seem insignificant in the end.



## HEADING SOUTH

My next destination was south of the border - Victoria's Lake Eildon. Covering almost 35,000 acres, it's a huge expanse of water, and has become a major tourist destination for Victorians for everything from jet skiing to house boating but especially fishing. Sadly a decade of drought saw this mighty lake shrink down to a mere puddle and it is only recently that the rains have rejuvenated it to the point where it is almost at capacity and the fishing has gone through the roof.

It is an interesting fishery because unlike Eucumbene that is purely trout, Eildon is home to a wide selection of species including yellowbelly, Murray cod and some huge redfin as well as trout. Our trip coincided with the cooler months and was all about trout trolling so I enlisted the help of local guru - Steve Vidler.

Steve's a local gun and spends every spare minute on the water fishing and his knowledge was quickly obvious as we hooked up within seconds of putting the lures in. The first fish wasn't a monster but after the tough fishing we had copped at Eucumbene, we were stoked.


Fishing out of Steve's purpose built side console with the Yamaha just in gear we continued to work down the steep bank. Trolling is one of those techniques that many anglers try to complicate. Multiple rods, downriggers, cowbells and all sorts of other paraphernalia that is supposed to enhance the fishing, but in reality it often just creates more mess. Thankfully Steve's approach is similar to mine and we kept it simple with just three rods and being winter we only needed to run them flat lining since the trout were all high in the water column.

To me trolling can be a bit boring at times where you sit and wait for a bite however like any style of fishing the more active you are the more fish you will catch. So instead of laying idle we focused our efforts in close, tight against the bank or drowned timber. Dragging lures in this danger zone can be costly as casualties are expected but the rewards are so much higher than aimlessly cruising around in the middle of the lake. It really is a trade off because the closer you get to the snags the more fish you will catch but you will lose more lures.

When it comes to lures I usually like to run a small minnow, between 3 and 7cm in length like Scorpion's or Laser Pro's right out the back. Alternately the ever popular Tassie Devil sits in the opposite rod holder swimming closer to the boat. Down the centre, I run a deep diver like a Tilsan or sometimes even a soft plastic. When it comes to colour one thing hasn't changed and it's good to see that the good old pink and blue Tassie is still the favourite colour. Twenty years ago this lure blitzed and it is still just as effective today. I don't know what it is about trout but that bloody pink Tassie is a like a magnet for them.







The Eucumbene River provides a bonus option if the lake is not fishing well

***“It was as though a switch had been flicked and the trout came on instantly with the dropping sun”***



It's hard to go past a lure that has worked for decades and the Tassie Devil still works to this day

Needless to say the first three fish fell to these and I was starting to wonder whether we should swap my favourite gold Scorpion when finally I got a bite and then promptly lost it. On fire as usual McGlashan!

When trolling the key is to go as slow as possible, no faster than walking pace. This is where the four strokes really come into their own, not only do you save on fuel but they are also much quieter which is essential for finicky trout especially when flat lining. If you have a 2 stroke or your outboard idles too fast you can slow it down by towing a bucket or two which will create more drag.

Working our way around the edge of the lake we ended up in Big River Arm which is a real hotspot for trout. Staying tight in against the line of drowned timber we picked up a series of small browns. Interestingly, like Eucumbene the rainbows were light on the ground but the consistent action on the brown trout was more than enough to keep us all happy including the cameraman.

As the day wore on the fishing slowed noticeably so we pulled into the bank for lunch. Lighting a fire and enjoying homemade venison snags that had been harvested from the very hills around Eildon was a special treat all on its own. But with a coffee warming us up we were soon back on the lake fishing again.




The bonus in Lake Eildon is the variety in the form of Murray cod and redfin perch



### LAST LIGHT BITE

As the sun dropped behind the hills the fish came on big time. It was late arvo and we were making our way back to the ramp when suddenly it was as though a switch had been flicked and the trout came on instantly with the dropping sun.

Interestingly the Tassie's were less productive and suddenly it was the hard bodies that were getting hammered time and time again. It was a great little session with the fish hooking up consistently and growing all the time before the failing light had our producer calling it a day.

The trip really was quite interesting and highlighted how things have changed for the better and the worse depending on how you look at it. Eucumbene seems to have less fish but the browns are undoubtedly bigger on average these days while the rains are near non-existent. Alternatively, Eildon with its high water level is seriously rocking and numbers of all species are right up there. Best of all I barely scratched the surface and have all the natives to chase on the next trip. 

***“This fishery fires 12 months of the year and has no closed season”***





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# PROJECT PIONEER

BY ADAM NICOLSON



The new MF boat is proving to be a truly versatile fishing platform



With extra-wide gunwales, you can comfortably stand around the edge of the boat without fear of listing

A little while ago, I wrote a small piece in my editorial about the new MF boat. A Pioneer Cape Island 186 was the boat of choice due to its capabilities in a range of environments and we've finally found the time to get it on the water for a few runs and I can happily report that she is a beast of a boat!

As I spoke briefly about, the whole point of this boat was to allow us to cover more options with the one boat, an all-rounder of sorts, and so far it's proving itself to be just that. You might think that by the looks of it, it's no boat to take to sea but I'm telling you, you'd be wrong. Sure a bigger boat with more protection from the elements is better suited to fishing wide but this thing has so far fared very well. Testament to the fact are the few trips out the heads so far being tuna runs and at over 35 nautical miles each way and easily 6–8 hours of trolling on each trip, it gave us a good feel of how the boat operates in swell and chop. Yeah, we had a couple of mint days where it felt as though we were fishing sheltered waters but we also had



one horrid day that would have tested a much larger boats capabilities. We got wet but at no point did we ever feel unsafe. It's a wide boat and is incredibly stable so it handles a side on roll with ease while punching through swell on the nose pretty comfortably. She does hold a bit of weight so take a wave too fast and you'll feel the drop but apart from that, the boat is perfectly capable of fishing offshore so long as you're smart about the days you choose to head out.

On the opposite end of the scale, I've just returned from a trip down to Mallacoota fishing for bream. You can't get much more removed from trolling for tuna than flicking tiny vibes for bream so again, it was a great test to see if the boat is equally suited and again, it was. In fact, the Cape Island was in its element fishing the shallow flats in 'Coota. It's a big lake and there is plenty of ground to cover, but luckily it's a fast boat – with two of us on board and a mountain of gear, the new Mercury outboard pushed us to around 42 knots and I can attest to a top speed of just shy of 50 knots with less weight. That's fast enough in my books!

Across the flats, she draws little, perfectly capable of fishing water of under a metre without the fear of getting stuck. At rest, it is an incredibly stable platform allowing safe manoeuvring about the boat with very little roll and the extra-wide gunwales let the angler/s walk around the full length of the boat with ease.

At around 1100kgs, the Cape Island can be towed by most mid sized 4WD's - the Isuzu MU-X pictured made short work of a long run down to Mallacoota.

At 1100kgs, the Cape Island is a very comfortable load to tow - the Isuzu MU-X pictured made short work of a long run down to Mallacoota.

**35 nautical miles off the coast and she's still loving it!**



## FISHABILITY

The Cape Island has been squarely aimed at the inshore fishing scene and being an American built boat, she's classified as a bay boat. This basically means it's built to fish inshore waters and is ideally suited here in Australia to estuary, bay and harbour fishing.

Comfort and fishability were at the forefront of the design and an emphasis was certainly placed on lure and fly fishing. Everything is designed to fold flat so there is nothing to get line caught on, nothing to trip over and plenty of room to get around. This is a feature that is required by fly fishers in the states as there is nothing to get the fly line tangled in when a big fish takes the fly and this will prove pretty handy here in OZ too.



**Getting the boat on and off is easy with a drive on/drive off fully rolled trailer**

**The custom designed Easy Tow dual axle trailer pulled by an Isuzu MU-X made towing easy**





## MF BOAT

As well as the huge amount of space up the front with a full size casting platform and also the bow to fish from, the rear of the boat provides a second casting deck at a lower level. With these two decks in combination, it gives anglers the option of getting up a bit higher for sight casting up the front while still being able to get down nice and low to the water for landing a fish or remaining a bit more stealthy if it's needed.

There are two trolling rod holders

down the back of the boat. There is certainly going to be the need for more so watch this space for a few custom add ons that should improve our ability to troll in the bluewater and also keep a few rods on the deck for a quick change of outfit when lure fishing.

The 80 litre live well behind the driver's seat will happily hold enough bait for a day on the reef or the bluewater and had no trouble housing a full bag of five solid bream in 'Coota.



Storage under the front deck will house dual batteries for an electric motor or plenty of tackle without them



The massive Carolina flared bow does a great job of deflecting spray

***"Comfort and fishability were at the forefront of the design and an emphasis was certainly placed on lure and fly fishing"***

On the water, it's a beautiful boat with the performance to match





## STORAGE OPTIONS

The Cape Island really steps it up from many other boats when it comes to storage. The idea being, there is a place for everything and so far, we're still figuring out the best place for all our gear but have fished with loads of tackle and rods and have never really had the need to put gear on the deck. There's nothing that drives me crazier than having tackle and rods flying around – it'll usually end in tears whether it's a broken rod or a lure in someone's flesh!

Up the front, the Cape Island has a small anchor well with a docking system that keeps a sand anchor locked into place. It's a nice feature as I'm sure everyone has had the displeasure of opening the hatch to find the anchor under a tonne of rope and well and truly tangled. It's not a huge well and won't house hundreds of metres of rope but at this stage it has around 50 metres which should be plenty for our needs as we do very little anchoring in deep water.

Under the front casting deck is a large dry compartment with ample room for storing tackle, electric motor batteries, cameras and any other gear that needs to remain dry.

Twin lockable rod lockers are accessed through the gunwales on both sides of the boat and official hold three rods on each side and up to nine foot long. Personally, I've had no problem fitting two smaller bream/bass rods in each tube which doubles its capabilities to twelve rods without a single one needing to go on the deck. That's pretty handy when fishing for bream/bass/barra etc that require plenty of lure changes throughout the day. As well as the rods, I find these two lockers great for holding my safety gear at the base to maximise space.

In front of the console, a cushioned esky doubles as a seat for extra passengers and is shackled securely to the deck so there is no movement. It does lack a grab rail here so it's not recommended to sit

here in any sort of rough conditions.

Moving towards the rear and under the driver's seat, there is a huge kill tank which can be utilised for a variety of things. It runs the full width of the boat and personally, I've had a 60 kilo plus tuna and a 45 kilo tuna in there at the same time as well as having plenty of room left for four bags of ice and a 20 kilo block of trap bait pilchards. When it's not full of tuna though, it's great for storing the sometimes massive amounts of camera gear and tackle that we require on some of our trips. While it's not official dry storage, it never gets a drop of water through the drain holes and if need be for peace of mind, I could easily plug these up to ensure this is the case.

At the rear of the boat, two large square compartments are good for housing more gear although they do take on a bit of water through both the drainage tubes and maybe a bit that comes over the side of the boat. At the moment, I've been using them to store an extra 20 litres of fuel either side in jerry cans for the big runs for tuna although so far I haven't come anywhere near dragging them out due to the massive 180 litre fuel tank.



While it's a very versatile boat, estuary fishing is its domain



The lockable rod lockers officially house 3 rods each side but they will easily take 6 smaller outfits



The eighty litre live well is big enough for most scenarios and the large rear storage compartments are great for any gear that doesn't mind a swim



The huge kill tank can hold plenty of fish but will mainly be used as tackle storage



Eight rods, two tackle bags and camera gear stowed in this image and not a thing on the deck!

## THE HELM

The Cape Island is designed as a sit-down-and-drive boat which I find great. Even at sea in rough conditions, I haven't needed to stand in order to compensate for jarring as the helm is set well back towards the rear and generally there is very little impact. If you do wish to stand and drive though, the adjustable steering wheel can be moved to suit which is a great addition as standing with the wheel in the down position can be a bit tough. The steering wheel

has a driving knob on it which really gives you plenty of control and better feeling for manoeuvring.

A custom designed Pioneer switch panel with 12 volt socket keeps everything neat and tidy and allows operation of eight functions such as nav lights, cockpit lights, aerators, bilge etc. The console is compact in order to maximise fishing space but still has plenty of room to mount gauges, electronics etc. Around the console is a stainless grab rail which keeps a couple of clamp mounted rod holders and will most likely be built up further in order to mount a Perspex screen to protect the console sounder.

Wrapping up, although the boats only been in our possession for a short time, we've managed to nab some spectacular fish and have definitely showcased its versatility and look forward to many more trips in the future and a massive range of species. Keep an eye out in the coming issues for a further run-down of all the additions and a full account of the power-up and performance as we take this boat from a comfortable platform to a fishing machine!

For more information on the Pioneer Cape Island 186, check out [www.pioneerboatssydney.com.au](http://www.pioneerboatssydney.com.au) or phone 02 9724 7474. 📞



The console is set well back providing great weight distribution. It's small and simple yet functional

## SPECS

**LENGTH:** 5.64 metres  
**FUEL CAPACITY:** 180 litres  
**BEAM:** 2.28 metres  
**DRAFT:** 330mm  
**POWER:** 150hp Mercury four stroke

*"We've managed to nab some spectacular fish and have definitely showcased its versatility"*

Pioneer have designed the Cape Island with minimal clutter and loads of deck space





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# FINDING BIG RED



Stoked with this brace of reddie's!

**Lubin's tactics have been paying off in the form of some giant redfin**

**R**edfin would have to be right up there with the most popular freshwater fish in Australia, I reckon it sits closely behind the Murray cod in the Southern states. Although most of the redfin caught are only scrappers, it's the big, awesome looking creatures that I go out of my way to catch.

As most of you would know, redfin have a tendency to over populate a water way quite easily but luckily there are tactics to specially target the bigger specimens. Big reddie's are found in both lakes and rivers and each require a slightly different approach. The constant between the two different types of water, though, is that you must fish only for the big redfin and big redfin only. This means going through the day with less bites, but more often than not, the bite you do get is a cracker and makes all the persistence worthwhile. Like most of my fishing these days I prefer to set myself a challenge and persist until I achieve that goal rather than taking the easy road. I reckon it betters you as a fisher person.


## LAKES

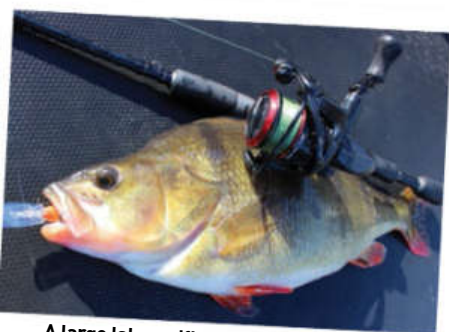
In lakes, big reddie's love to hang around structure. Whether it is weed beds, sunken timber or rock walls, big redfin won't stray too far from these types of areas. In a boat, both trolling and casting are effective and using the side scan on your

sounder can really pay off. While searching it's a good idea to put a couple of lures out the back while moving along at a steady speed. Generally hard bodies in the 6-8cm size that dive two to four metres, and have a moderate action will get the attention of the bigger class of fish. Looking at the sounder you can scan likely areas of the lake looking for any quality fish soundings. Once you've found a worthwhile sounding, and if the trolling lures didn't get smashed, proceed to drift and cast the area. But remember only cast the upsized lures so that you stop the little fish from interfering with your chances of a bigger class fish. Usually reddie's can't help themselves and results will be instant, if not, you may need to work the area until one commits. Keep in mind, bites will be fewer because you are after that one whopper.

I quite like using vibes such as Rapala's Rippin' Rap 05 and 07 for this style of drifting and casting. By upgrading the trebles to slightly larger singles means that it's usually the larger fish that the hooks find there mark in. Always vary retrieve styles, from sharp rips to slow rolls, until you get one to stick.

## RIVERS AND CREEKS

Ever since I was a little kid, I've loved hunting big redfin in small creeks and rivers. There is something about working through the sticks and grass in search of that next pool of unfished or yet to be explored water. Just like fishing lakes, I found there was a way to hunt out the better sized fish. The key that I found was once again to go without regular bites and fish with much larger lures than normal until a whopper came out. Generally in creeks, lures in the 40 - 50mm range are pretty standard and will get the attention from any fish that maybe hunting about. But when you start to use 70 - 100mm lures you will find the fish that does come out is a chance of a PB. Both hardbodies and spinnerbaits are great for this method of fishing and really it comes down to what you feel like using on the day. Covering water is the key here, not lure changes, so make sure you've packed light and are prepared for some walking. Whopper reddie's in creeks are, frequently, a first cast fish. If I haven't caught anything in five or six casts then it's time to move to the next pool. These areas can be refished on the way back to the car later in the day, after the fish has had a chance to think about what it has missed out on! 



A large lake redfin that smashed a hard body



Lee Rayner with a small water fish that ate a Rapala Rippin' Rap



The inland locations are often stunning places to fish



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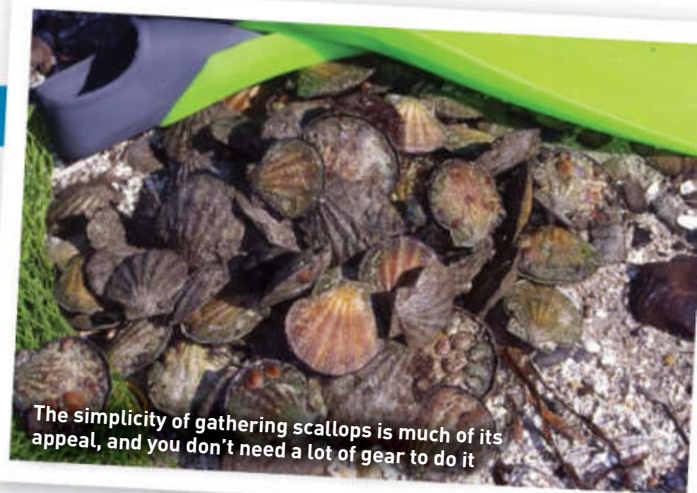






# HUNTING & GATHERING

**As fisho's it's not only fish we target when looking to extract a feed from the ocean. Shane Murton details the joys of collecting scallops**



The simplicity of gathering scallops is much of its appeal, and you don't need a lot of gear to do it



The author with a bag of scallops - plenty of top tucker there!



One of the simplest ways to cook up a batch of scallops is to fry them in garlic and honey - easy seafood!



Boil your scallops in saltwater until they just open then remove from the heat

**L**ike many anglers I just love being around the water, even without a rod and reel in the hand. As a kid growing up on the coast, when we weren't fishing we'd do a lot of snorkelling and spearing and collect any edible crustaceans or shellfish we'd come across, with the humble scallop probably the most common - and tasty - of the bunch.

Getting a bulging bag of scallops is still a satisfying way to spend a day on the coast, and it can be great family fun, or treated as a more serious means to get some prime seafood. Any way you approach it, it's usually a relaxing day out with reliable results.

## SCALLOP HOT SPOTS

Scallops are quite accessible which is much of their appeal, and when you find a 'bed' of them it isn't hard to accumulate a catch in quick time.

In inshore areas they prefer to reside over a combination bottom, that is grounds where there's usually patchy weed and sand, or low rock and sand. Often these bivalves get growth on their shells and become quite camouflaged on this type of bottom, and usually you'll only spot the shadow on the lip of the shell telling you they're not a rock and that it's actually a living and breathing creature. They can also be found over a mud/silt bottom type in parts, and the various scallops species will have slightly differing habits. All in all though they're more than accessible for those, like myself, who are very much amateur divers/snorkelers. While many of the easy populations get mopped up, if you're prepared to push a bit deeper or try looking in areas that avoid attention you'll come up with the goods. Scallops can literally be found in a metre of water and above, so think outside the square if you're struggling. Once you crack the code and work out the depth they're holding, and the bottom type, it all gets a lot easier.

## GEAR

Chasing scallops can be as simple or as complicated as you want to make it. I mainly pester inshore populations in areas that can be reached without the need for air tanks and full-fledged dive gear. Obviously how deep you can dive and how long you can hold your breath will determine if you can reach them and collect enough with basic snorkelling equipment or not. I'm finding out as you get older it does get a touch harder!

The deeper you chase them, the less fished they generally are, but there's a point you'll need to be using more elaborate dive gear. While productive, this goes against the theme of quick and easy dives that I prefer, but it's all doable and fun if that's your thing.


For the most part I never have too many problems with a half decent facemask/snorkel combo, flippers, dive belt and a couple of weights. A dive bag is mandatory for putting your scallops in. Mates of mine have told me stories of stuffing them down their jocks only to have them wake up and start snapping with obvious implications, which is enough of a reason to come prepared!

If you have a fair drive to get back home after collecting these shelled treats, then be sure to bring an esky to prevent them from spoiling, and generally keep them cool and out of the sun.

## COOKING

Now onto the fun part; eating the spoils of your hard work. Scallops are great dude food, as you don't have to do much to them to have a ripper snack, or they can of course be the centrepiece of something more sophisticated if you wish. I must admit that many of ours are cooked up not long after capture and are consumed with a few beers to round out a great day of sun and saltwater.

The key with scallops is to not overcook them. Oftentimes we add them to boiling salty water and cook them just long enough until they start to open, then remove them from the water and cool them down to stop the cooking process. The meat is then taken out of the shell and any unwanted parts are trimmed away.

The simplest way we've found to eat them is to fry them with garlic, honey and butter in a pan and serve with salad. Alternatively they can be placed in jars with vinegar, Worcestershire sauce and pepper and stored in the fridge for extended periods for a fast snack. This said, the culinary possibilities are endless, and even non seafood lovers will find fresh caught scallops hard to refuse. They really are one of life's simple pleasures and make a great DIY option! 



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# READY-SET-GO!

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Light line, large single hooks and in tight country. It's a tough call but you really need to drive the hooks home here



It's pretty hard to beat that feeling. You know the one, the feeling of lifting that rod tip and driving the hooks into what could be a trophy fish. It's that split second that seems to last forever and the anticipation of what the fish will do once you set the hooks is what keeps us coming back for more. As good as it is though, it's one of those things in fishing that you can get really wrong.

There are few things in fishing more important than setting the hook. Whether it's after a tentative bump on your lure or a drag screaming run after a big fish takes your live bait, getting it all right is so important. It's the difference between coming up tight and bitter disappointment. But what factors should you be thinking about when driving that hook home?

Hook styles play a big role with the elephant in the room here being the use of circle hooks. Most people will know by now that a circle hook is best left to load up slowly under the tension of the drag only, leaving the hook to find its mark in the corner of the jaw. Circles aside though, should all hook sets be treated the same? In my opinion, no way!

Let's take a look at lures and in particular the use of trebles and singles. You could be forgiven for thinking that a treble, due to them consisting of three hook points, will need to be driven home harder in order to get all or at least a couple of the hooks to stick but generally as there are multiple points, each would be a smaller gape than a single so they won't take the same amount of power to find their mark. Also, due to that smaller gape,

they will pull out of the fish more easily so I find with trebles you need to be a bit more subtle. Singles on the other hand, once they are driven home, they rarely pull free so they are best given a fair amount of stick to make sure they go in well the first time.

Hook strength is another thing that you should really bear in mind. I have seen a few hooks snap in my time and the majority have been on the hook set. It can be a number of things that contribute to this happening but the most common is using heavier braids and a stiff rod with no give. Since the introduction of braid, I would place a bet that a lot more hooks are broken simply due to there being no stretch. Combine this with the ability to use heavier mainline as braid is thinner and you can see why it can happen easily. Using shock leaders and a rod with a bit of cushioning will ensure the pressure never gets to the point where the hook will break.

On top of having all the right gear for the job, experience will play a big part in ensuring the connection between you and the fish stays tight. Experience is what tells you when you need to strike a fish, when you need to let it run for another second or two and how hard or soft you'll need to be with it. It's pretty hard to know how long to feed a particular fish a bait if you've never caught that fish before so expect a few misses as you hone your skills and the more research you do, the more of an understanding you'll have of how a particular fish feeds and more importantly, when to strike it.

**"The anticipation of what the fish will do once you set the hooks is what keeps us coming back for more"**



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## LEAP FOR JOY?

**Does a fish jump simply out of love for life or is there more to this age-old theory than meets the eye?**

If you've ever been quietly fishing out on an estuary, especially at dusk, you will no doubt have been periodically disturbed from your reverie by the splash of a mullet leaping clear of the water. And maybe this odd behaviour caused a question mark to appear above your head... Why on earth are they doing that? Good question.

There are many species of mullet, but the one that seems to do most, and probably all of the leaping is the bully or sea mullet, *Mugil cephalus*, a species found right round the world. And not only may the bully mullet be the only mullet which jumps, it is one of only a small number of fish species that leap from the water spontaneously. Another is the sailfish, often readily observed 'free jumping' in long series of energetic jumps. It is almost certain that

that they leap simply out of sheer exuberance, or as the French would say, *joie de vie*?

Even though I do like these theories, wearing my scientist's hat, I figured that they are very likely, and in any case, pretty hard to prove – after all, how can you tell if a mullet is really happy? It turns out that, while the question had obviously crossed the minds of many biologists, apparently only one appears to have investigated this phenomenon in any detail. Fortunately though, his work resulted in his putting forward what to me seems to be a perfectly plausible hypothesis as to the reason for mullet jumping. H.D. Hoese is the biologist in question, and his paper on why mullet jump, subtitled, "the diving bell hypothesis", revealed that bully mullet possess a rather unique physical feature. At the back of their

*"Perhaps like me you might also like to think that there is just a little 'joy of living' associated with the leap as well"*



As well as mullet, sailfish are well documented 'free' jumpers however their behaviour is more easily explained

sailfish are doing this in order to frighten and round up prey fishes, but that explanation can't apply to bully mullet since their diet consists of rotting organic matter on the bottom of the estuary. Closer observation shows that the jump of the mullet is quite distinctive. There is usually no real urgency to the jump, being more of a lazy, slow flop out of the water and back. Sometimes, the fish don't even leave the water, but simply bob up and down with their heads poking out of the water.

So what are some of the possible reasons for this behaviour? Escape from predators is a possibility, but usually when this occurs, a whole school of fish will shower from the water in obvious panic. Also, a fish fleeing from a predator will often jump repeatedly, not intermittently as is the case with the lazy flop of the bully mullet. And then there are the more fanciful 'theories' about the underlying motivations for the leap of the mullet. For example, it has been suggested to me by quite sober anglers that, because mullet usually swim in murky water, they jump every now and then to get their bearings and see where they are going! Or, how about the idea

throats there is an expanded chamber richly supplied with blood vessels. Usually, lots of blood vessels mean lots of gaseous exchange, so in this case, it is theorised (but not proven) that this highly vascularized chamber probably acts as a supplement to gill respiration, supplying at least some oxygen to the blood stream. The area in question is called the pharyngobranchial organ (literally, "throat-gill"), and it is thought that jumping or broaching mullet actually gulp a mouthful of air, from which oxygen is extracted by means of this extra respiratory organ. This does make perfect sense, since mullet spend a lot of their time sifting through silt and organic sludge on the bottom of estuaries where oxygen levels can often be extremely low. Thus, every now and then, when the urge for more oxygen strikes, mullet come to the surface for a mouthful of air, taking it back down with them just like an old fashioned diving bell. The theory is also supported by the fact that daytime and dusk jumping is far more frequent than at night. During the day, oxygen levels are generally depleted in water, so that dusk would generally coincide with the lowest levels. So next time you see or hear the jump of the mullet, you will know that it is simply coming up for air. But then again, perhaps like me you might also like to think that there is just a little 'joy of living' associated with the leap as well. MF





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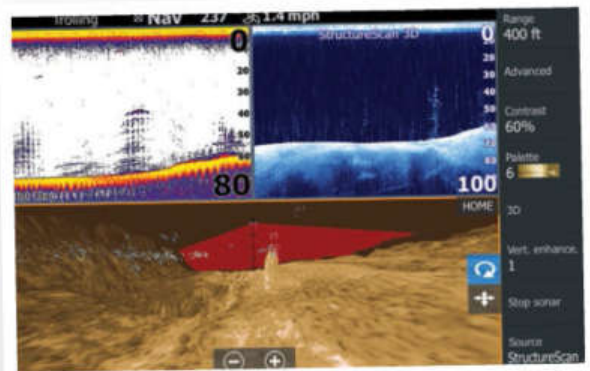
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Every couple of years it seems the Shimano team grab hold of the Stradic spin reel lineup and make a great reel even better. Well the 2016 reels continue that tradition — big time!

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gear ratios, so cast lures will really motor on the retrieve. Aero Wrap II, the AR-C spool, One Piece Bail and G-Free Body all demonstrate that these reels are going to be a repetitive caster's delight to use, with better balance in the hand. While the new gen' Stradics can be used just about anywhere, the presence of Coreprotect on the roller clutch, the drag, the body and the line roller, indicate that these reels are going to be perfectly at home in the world's harshest environment — the salt.

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## TT SNAKELOCKZ JIGHEAD

Angler requests have again inspired the latest addition to the TT Lures stable, the SnakelockZ jighead. Combining the 'chin lock' system from their ChinlockZ hooks, with the free-swinging front weight concept of their Snake Head jigheads, the team at TT have enabled anglers to secure their plastic in place with the 'chin lock' while offering maximum action and the weight required to get the soft plastic deep in structure with minimal chance of snagging.

In the process of developing the SnakelockZ jigheads it was decided to utilise a stainless steel, through wire loop, with a locking system that enables anglers to twist and unclip the hook from the head. This gives anglers the freedom to swap hook sizes and weights as required, or

attach a different hook to the head to suit a particular soft plastic or technique. The SnakelockZ are ideal for locking the super-soft and flexible, 10X Tough ZMan plastics in place on the jighead, but are also suitable for other brands of soft plastic lures.

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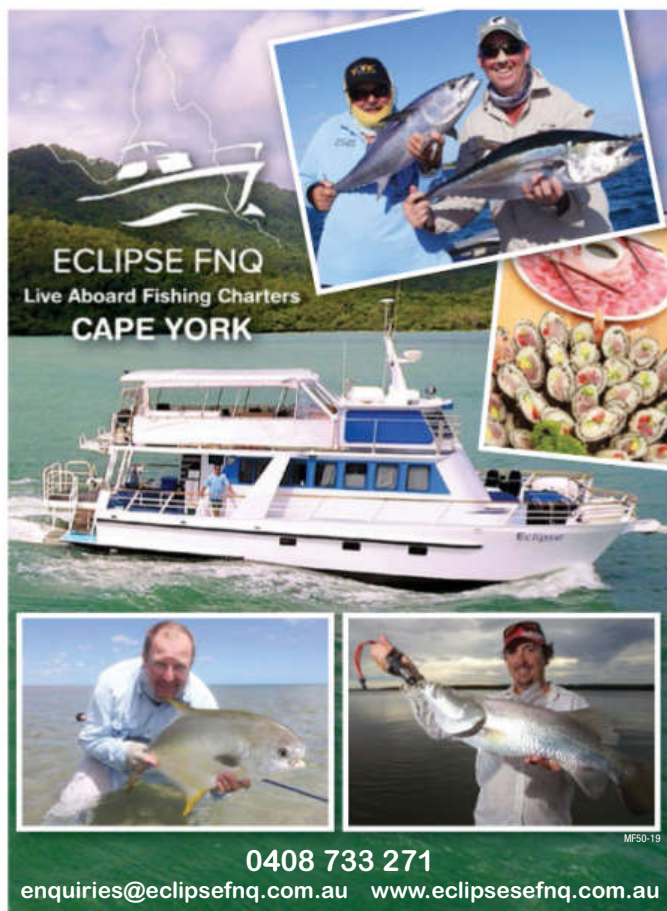
for a more realistic presentation. Top quality skirts held in place with wire means these spinnerbaits are both durable as well as highly effective.

**The Highpitcher comes in 1/4oz (7g); 5/16oz (9g) 3/8oz (11g); 1/2oz (14g) and 5/8oz (18g) and has a RRP of around \$22.95.**

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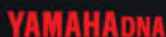
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